Thomas F. Torrey

S. LE
DUPLICATE

ESSAYS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

RELATIVE TO THE

PRESENT STATE OF RELIGION

1. On the Controversy about some Burgess Oaths.
2. On the Secession Testimony.
3. On Public Covenanting.
4. On the Revolution Settlement.
5. On Church-Communion.
6. On the Constitution of the Associate Synod.
7. On Ecclesiastical Censures.
8. On the Religious Character of the Times.

By JOHN ANDERSON.

Prov. xxiii. 23. *Buy the truth, and sell it not.*

GLASGOW:

Printed by JOHN BRYCE, and Sold at his Shop, opposite Gibson's-wynd, *Saltmarket.*

M,DCC,LXXXII.

BIBLIOTHECA · ECCLESIÆ · SCOTICANÆ ·

PREFACE.

THE Judicial teſtimony of the aſſociate preſbytery, has now been forty-five years in the hands of the public; and yet it ſeems to be little attended to or underſtood. Hence the cold indifference of its profeſſed friends; while others are led by prejudice to an open enmity againſt it. "The greater part of "your teſtimony," ſay many, "conſiſts of facts "with which we are unacquainted, and in which we "cannot conceive ourſelves to have any intereſt. "We never thought Chriſtianity required us to ſtudy "the preciſe meaning of acts of parliament, or the "exactneſs of the dates of hiſtory. Satisfied that "the duties of our ſtation are enough to employ our "whole attention, we leave it to the critics and to "the dealers in controverſy, to wrangle about thoſe "inſignificant circumſtances. In ſhort, we cannot "ſee the *practical* uſe of your teſtimony: ſhew us "that it contributes to render the eſpouſers of it "more meek, more humble, more ſelf-denied, more "abundant in the love of God and men, and more "free from all the oppoſite vices, or we ſhall ſtill "continue to judge it unworthy of our examination." Theſe objections have been kept in eye through the following eſſays: ſo that the ſubjects of them are treated in a practical, rather than in a critical or controverſial manner.

THOUGH the writer has endeavoured to conſider theſe ſubjects without regard to any party or any prejudice; though he wiſhed truth to be the orna-

ment of his page, and was well reſolved to follow where-ever evidence led; he will hardly eſcape the imputation of a blameable attachment to the opinions of *his party*, eſpecially with ſuch readers as have the moſt obſtinate and bigotted predilection for thoſe of *their own*. But it may be aſked, whether a writer's principles ſhould be diſregarded, becauſe he is ſo much convinced of the truth and importance of thoſe principles, that he eſteems it his happineſs to enjoy the fellowſhip of a church that profeſſes her adherence to them? Mr. Locke's treatiſe on civil government is materially a defence of the conſtitution of his own country as it was eſtabliſhed at the Revolution: Is it therefore the leſs valuable? The truth is, to *reject* a religious opinion, merely becauſe it is held by thoſe with whom we are connected, would be no leſs unreaſonable, but far more ill natured and inconſiſtent than to *receive* it on that account.

The writer muſt now leave theſe Eſſays to the judgment of the candid reader; or rather he wiſhes to leave them in his hand, who alone can make them uſeful to his church; who *hath choſen the fooliſh things of the world to confound the wiſe; the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty: the baſe things of the world, and things which are deſpiſed, hath God choſen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought the things which are.*

ESSAY I.

Of SOME BURGESS OATHS.

WHEN People are formed into Societies, they always come under obligations, which are either expreſſed or implied, to be uſeful to one another. Sometimes theſe obligations are confirmed by an Oath. Hence when one is admitted member of a Corporation, or obtains the freedom of a city, he is commonly ſworn to be faithful to the intereſts of that City or Corporation.

One would naturally expect that the obligations he ſhould have to come under on being admitted into any Society, would be only ſuch as are ſuitable to the nature of that Society, and to the end for which it was formed: if it were a civil Society, that the obligations would be of a ſecular kind; or if it were a religious Society, that they would be of a religious kind. But from the great influence which religion is generally acknowledged to have on human affairs, from the pride and animoſity of religious parties who are too apt to magnify themſelves upon any worldly advantage they have over one another, and from the prevailing diſpoſition of the multitude to mingle religion with their worldly intereſts, and to make the former ſubſervient to the latter; from theſe and the like cauſes it has come about that perſons are too often brought under explicit engagements to ſome profeſſion of religion in order to their admiſſion into a Society of

a purely civil nature. Thus in some Burgess Oaths we have the following religious clause, which has been the subject of so much controversy among Seceders: 'I protest before God and your Lordships 'that I profess and allow with my heart the true re- 'ligion presently professed within this realm and au- 'thorised by the laws thereof, renouncing the Ro- 'man religion called Papistry.'

History of the Controversy concerning the Religious Clause in some Burgess Oaths.

In the Year 1744, The Associate Presbytery found it necessary, from the multiplicity of business and from the extent of the Secession, to form itself into a Synod, which was to have three Presbyteries subordinate to it. The Associate Synod met for the first time in the beginning of March 1745.

One of the first things which they entered upon, was, the consideration of a motion for the removal of hindrances to the duty of Covenanting; a motion which immediately brought on the controversy of the religious clause in some Burgess Oaths, that clause being deemed by several members inconsistent with the present state of the Secession Testimony. The views of these members were vehemently opposed, and the debate was carried on at great length in each of the four meetings that were held in 1745.

At last, on the ninth of April in the following year, the Synod came to a decision, by which the

" Swearing of the Religious Clauſe in ſome Bur-
" geſs Oaths, by any under their Inſpection, as
" that clauſe comes neceſſarily in this period, to
" be uſed and applied, does not agree to the pre-
" ſent ſtate of the teſtimony for religion and refor-
" formation, which the Synod, with thoſe under
" their inſpection, are maintaining, and particu-
" larly that it does not conſiſt with an entering in-
" to the Bond for Renewing our Solemn Cove-
" nants: and that therefore thoſe of the Seceſſion
" cannot further, with ſafety of conſcience and
" without ſin, ſwear any Burgeſs Oath with the
" ſaid Religious Clauſe; while matters with re-
" ference to the profeſſion and ſettlement of Re-
" ligion, continue in ſuch circumſtances as at
" preſent."

THIS deciſion was carried by a majority of thirteen againſt nine.

THE thinneſs of the houſe and the ſmallneſs of the majority have been objected to this deciſion.

IF that thinneſs or majority could be proved to have been procured by unfair means, ſuch a circumſtance would, no doubt, very much diminiſh the authority of the deciſion. But ſince this can hardly be ſaid to have been ſo much as attempted, (whatever may have been ſuggeſted as to the impropriety of the time in which a queſtion of ſo great importance was brought to a determination) the validity of this deciſion, as a deed of the Aſſociate Synod, ſtands unimpeached.

IT is neceſſary to obſerve that it was not a negative that was oppoſed to the overture for condemning the religious clauſe; but only a motion for a delay. Hence one would naturally ſuppoſe that ſeveral, who were convinced of the unlawfulneſs of the Burgeſs Oath, would be led, from the conſideration of circumſtances, to vote for a delay: And this was actually the caſe; for we are well aſſured that ſome voted for the delay who

afterwards acquiesced in the decision. So that the friends of the overture absolutely considered, were a much greater number than they appeared to be from this division.

THE Synod met again in September, 1746. Those who had protested against the decision concerning the religious clause of some Burgess Oaths, now thought proper to bring in the question, Whether that decision should be a term of Ministerial and Christian Communion?

A READER who is unacquainted with the history of this affair, if he has only read the Synod's decision, will be very much surprised at this question, as it seems to insinuate that the decision might stand, and yet the evil of swearing the Burgess Oath never be taken notice of; and that the Synod might find something to be a heinous and publick offence; an offence no less than that of swearing contradictory oaths; and at the same time go into a resolution exempting the offenders from all censure.

THIS question was of such a nature that the bringing in and vehement pressing of it gave every one just cause to fear an approaching rupture of the Synod. The question, Whether the decision with regard to the religious clause in some Burgess Oaths, was to be a term of Communion? was the same as Whether the protestors against the decision, adhering to the spirit of their protest, were still to be in Communion with the supporters of the decision? that is, Whether there was or was not to be a breach? Let any one judge, then, who were most instrumental in bringing on that mournful event? those who were for such a question, or those who were against it?

IT has been often observed, that this was a question in which those who had protested against the Synod's decision, were parties. They would not have been so in the question, Whether the Act

ſhould be repealed? that being a queſtion concerning a point of truth and duty, of the ſame import as Whether the religious clauſe in ſome Burgeſs Oaths were ſinful? But this queſtion, Term, or not, of communion? ſeemed to ſuppoſe the condemnatory Act of Synod, and reſpected the conſequence of inattention or oppoſition to that Act. It was, in effect, evidently the ſame as if it had been, Whether thoſe who neglected or oppoſed the Synod's deciſion, were to be found fault with? Now, let the Reader judge, whether a violent oppoſer of that deciſion was a party in ſuch a queſtion.

SEVERAL members pleaded with great force of argument againſt proceeding any further in the conſideration of this queſtion. But others, and, among theſe ſome of the moſt reſpectable names inſiſted on it ſo warmly, that the majority agreed to have it further conſidered, thinking that, as yet, it would not be expedient to throw it out.

ON the eighth of April 1747, thoſe who had proteſted againſt the Synod's deciſion, again brought in their queſtion in this larger form: "Whether the deciſion about the religious clauſe "of ſome Burgeſs Oaths, paſſed by this Synod "in April, 1746, ſhall now or afterwards be "made a term of Miniſterial or Chriſtian Com-"munion; ay and until the making of the "ſame to be ſo, ſhall be referred by way of o-"verture, unto Preſbyteries and Kirk-ſeſſions, "in order to their giving their judgment there-"anent: that ſo there may, in the mean time, "be a friendly dealing among the members of "the Synod with one another, in a way of con-"ference aud prayer; in order to their coming, "through the Lord's pity, to ſee eye to eye in "the matter of the ſaid religious clauſe."

ANOTHER motion was made at the ſame time for having the reaſons read which thoſe who

protested against the Synod's decision, had given in, together with the answers which a committee had prepared. The question was put as to which of these motions should be first considered. A majority of seven votes was in favour of the former, the whole being twenty nine against twenty two. From this resolution fourteen ministers and ten elders dissented.

Next day, the friends of the question concerning the Synod's decision being a term of Communion insisting, with great animosity, on having it put without further delay, those on the other side joined in solemn declarations against the Synod going on to vote upon such a question: While the lights, which might have been given to the matter in dispute by hearing the before-mentioned reasons and answers, were suppressed; and while those who were directly parties in the affair, sustained themselves judges.

These declarations being made, the impatience of those in the opposition to the Synod's decision, was now so much increased as to admit of no longer delay. The Moderator was required, once and again, to call or to order the calling of the roll. The Moderator made no reply. Nor would the Clerk be prevailed on to call it. The business of voting on this question was now at a stand, had not the boldness of two members come in to help it forward: Mr. John Mac Cara and Mr. Henry Erskine thought proper to take upon them of their own accord, the one to call the roll, the other to mark the votes.

Those who voted in favour of the motion (and there were no other voters on this occasion) were in all nine Ministers and eleven Elders, of whom six Ministers and one Elder were directly parties.

Amidst so affecting a scene, it was necessary that some one should act as Moderator, and

maintain the Constitution of the Synod, the present Moderator, in the violence of the tumult, having ceased acting. In this case, it was necessary for those who adhered to the Constitution and the before-mentioned Decision of the Synod, to take measures, as they must have done, if a band of robbers, or the sweep of an irresistible tempest had deprived them of some of their number, and among others, of the Moderator and Clerk.

IT is usual in Presbyterial courts for the Moderator of the former meeting to officiate, as occasion requires, for the present Moderator. According to this custom, it was the part of Mr. Thomas Mair to deliver the following declaration.

" Whereas this meeting of Synod have now " passed a Vote, and made a resolution upon that " question, which has been insisted upon in oppo- " sition to a proceeding unto the reasons against " the sentence of Synod in April 1746, with the " answers to said Reasons: And considering the " protestations which have been entered this day, " concerning that affair; considering that by the " foresaid step this meeting of Synod have mate- " rially dropt the whole Testimony among their " hands, allowing of, at least for a time, a ma- " terial abjuration thereof; and considering that " besides a considerable number of Elders, the " majority of Ministers, who are the proper judg- " es in a controversy of Faith and case of Consci- " ence, and who could be judges in the present " controversy, have been all along contending for " the proper business and duty of the Synod, in " opposition to the contrary torrent: Therefore " I Thomas Mair, Minister of the Gospel at Or- " wel, do hereby declare, and protest, that the " lawful authority and power of the ASSOCIATE " SYNOD is devolved upon, and must ly in a con-

" ſtitute meeting of the foreſaid Members, Mini-
" ſters and Elders, together with any other Mem-
" bers who ſhall cleave unto them in a way of con-
" feſſing what ſinful ſteps and compliances they
" have fallen into on this occaſion: As likewiſe I
" declare and proteſt, that the foreſaid mem-
" bers ought, in duty to the Lord and his heri-
" tage, to take up and exerciſe the authority and
" power of the Aſſociate Synod, lawfully and ful-
" ly devolved npon them as above; and, for this
" end, to meet to-morrow at ten of the clock fore-
" noon, in Mr Gib's Houſe, that they may re-
" gularly enter upon and proceed in the buſineſs
" of the Synod."

Mr. Mair having made this declaration, removed with the twelve other Miniſters and ten Elders who had all along maintained a vigorous oppoſition to the putting of the before-mentioned queſtion. They met next day in Mr Gib's Houſe, and unanimouſly paſſed an Act, aſſerting the Conſtitution and Rights of the Aſſociate Synod. They afterwards proceeded to inflict Cenſure on the ſeparating Brethren. The ſentence of the greater Excommunication was not paſſed till nearly two years after the breach. Meanwhile, the controverſy of the religious clauſe in ſome Burgeſs Oaths was carried on in a great many publications on both ſides.

In the courſe of the debate, the field of enquiry was gradually enlarged, and ſeveral other ſubjects were handled; ſuch as, the nature of the Church's Teſtimony, the duty of Public Covenanting, the Scriptural terms of Church Communion, and the object and effect of Church Cenſures. *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.* The cloud that appears at firſt only a ſmall ſpeck, overſpreads in a little while the ample ſky. An opinion which was once deemed harmleſs or of little conſequence, has at length been ſeen to diffuſe itſelf ſo widely as to give the prevailing tincture to the

whole religious system of those who entertained it.

Of the IMPORTANCE *of the* CONTROVERSY *concerning the* RELIGIOUS CLAUSE *in some* BURGESS OATHS.

THE Importance of this controversy is a very natural conclusion from the history of it; considering the characters of those great and good men, who were engaged in it, and who, we may reasonably think, would not have disturbed the peace of the church for a light or trivial matter; considering too, the many important points that have been drawn into this controversy.

BUT it is a controversy that evidently carries very great importance in itself.

1. IT is a controversy about an Oath, which is a solemn appeal to The Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth, the Searcher of hearts, with regard to a person's truth and sincerity in what he says. If this appeal is either unnecessary, or in favour of any falsehood, it must be taking God's name in vain. The good man is one that *feareth an Oath*, Eccles. ix. 2.

2. THIS Oath contains a solemn engagement to a religious Profession; even to that which is presently authorised by the laws of the land. Now the glory of God and the good of our own souls, which are incomparably the most important things in the world, are nearly concerned in our profession of religion; for it is written, *With the mouth Confession is made unto Salvation.* It behoves us, therefore, to consider with all possible care, attention and impartiality, what is indeed sworn to in this

Oath, before we either take it, or juſtify the taking of it. If the religion preſently profeſſed and authoriſed by the laws of the land is wrong, ſo far wrong that we cannot ſafely hold Church Communion with thoſe whom theſe laws acknowledge as the profeſſors of it; engaging to it by oath, would, in that caſe, be unſpeakably diſhonouring to God, and prejudicial to our own ſouls.

3. It is a fact ſufficiently known, that the ſwearing of this Oath has given great offence to many of thoſe whom we muſt regard as the friends and followers of Chriſt. But ſuch offence is to be avoided by every lawful mean, as a moſt dangerous evil. It is an awful word which we have in Matth. xviii. 6. *But whoſo ſhall offend one of theſe little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a milſtone were hanged about his neck, and that he were caſt into the depths of the ſea.* Thus our Lord manifeſts his wonderful tenderneſs for his people by the guard that he plants around them. Good reaſon had the apoſtle to ſay, 1. Cor. viii. 13. *If meat make my brother offend, I will eat no fleſh while the world ſtandeth, leſt I make my brother to offend.*

O ye Rulers and Courts of Judicature, whether higher or lower, whether belonging to the Church or the State, beware of thinking it a ſmall matter to offend the Followers of Chriſt. On this account, the Synod of the Apoſtles and Elders, at Jeruſalem, Acts xv. enjoined the Gentile converts to abſtain from blood. Supported by ſuch a precedent, the Aſſociate Synod might well prohibit the Swearing of the Religious Clauſe of ſome Burgeſs Oaths, even ſuppoſing that clauſe, like the uſe of blood, to be in itſelf a matter of indifference.

Hence it is improper to ſpeak of the truth on this head as a matter of doubtful diſputation in which the Scripture, though the only Rule of our faith and practice, gives no certain direction. The

Bible is the whole Religion of Proteſtants, and ſerves for a lamp to guide their feet in the way of truth and peace with regard to every matter of real importance.

Of the MEANING *of the* RELIGIOUS CLAUSE *in ſome* BURGESS OATHS.

ONE circumſtance that may lead us into the true meaning of it, is the Time in which theſe Oaths were framed; the time of the reformation from Popery. The religious Clauſe would no doubt, be adapted to the ſtate of religion at that time. But it is well known, that in Scotland Proteſtants were then all included in one Church Communion. The original Framers, then, of this religious Clauſe, regarding the ſtate of religion in their own time, cannot reaſonably be ſuppoſed to have intended any other thing in theſe words, "I "profeſs and allow with my heart the true religion "preſently profeſſed within this realm, and autho-"riſed by the laws thereof," than an engagement to continue in that Communion which was deſcribed in the laws. Hence if we would keep to the primary deſign of the Framers of theſe Burgeſs Oaths, we muſt conſider the religious Clauſe as an obligation to that Communion authoriſed by the laws of the land.

IF any ſhould aſk, Whether our Forefathers meant, that we ſhould continue in the Communion of the Church by law eſtabliſhed, whatever her corruptions might be? we anſwer, by no means: But theſe Burgeſs Oaths were adapted to times, like their own, of reformation; and not to times of prevailing apoſtacy when the witneſſes of Chriſt are called forth to a Seceſſion from the Communi-

on of the Church eſtabliſhed by law. The word *Preſently* intimates, that the religious Clauſe is to be always underſtood as having a reſpect to the ſtate of religion at the time in which it is adminiſtered; and that it muſt be taken, or refuſed accordingly.

It is obvious that the words, "preſently profeſſed within this realm, and authoriſed by the laws of it," are an explication of the general expreſſion, "I profeſs the true religion." Hence the meaning would have been no other than it is, if the particle *as* had been uſed after the words *true religion*. Let us try any ſentence where, after a general term, words are uſed by way of explication, and we ſhall conſtantly find that inſerting this particle does nothing to alter the meaning of the ſentence. Thus in the following ſentence: Man, being a rational creature, is capable of glorifying and enjoying God: If we put the particle *as* after the word *man*, it gives the ſentence a more formal air of preciſion, but ſtill the meaning is the ſame. It is true, when the words that are uſed after a general term are not meant to explain it, but only to point out ſome accidental circumſtance, the inſerting of the particle *as* would often be very improper. So in the following ſentence: He fought bravely with a ſword formerly worn by a coward: Here *as* worn by a coward, would be ridiculous. But nobody ſuppoſes that the words in the religions clauſe, immediately following the general expreſſion, *I profeſs the true religion*, are of this kind.

It is a received maxim, that every oath ſhould be taken in the ſenſe of the adminiſtrator, and in purſuance of his declared deſign; and that all thoſe to whom he adminiſters it at the ſame time, ſhould be conſidered as taking it in the ſame ſenſe. Hence one ſhould think, that, as the adminiſtrator of theſe Burgeſs Oaths himſelf profeſſes the true re-

ligion in the way of Communion with the Church authoriſed by the laws of the Realm, ſo he would naturally expect that thoſe who take theſe Oaths, ſhould profeſs the true religion in the ſame way. The practice of the magiſtrate may ſerve to aſcertain the ſenſe in which he intends theſe Oaths ſhould be taken. Beſides, to ſuppoſe that the Magiſtrate, while he adminiſters theſe Oaths to all in preciſely the ſame terms, really means to bring under an engagement to profeſs the true religion, ſo many in one way, ſo many in a different way; ſome to be in Communion with the eſtabliſhed Church, and others to be in a ſtate of Seceſſion from it; to ſuppoſe this appears to be altogether abſurd, and deprives theſe Oaths, not only of the ſenſe of the adminiſtrator, but of any determinate ſenſe whatſoever.

PERHAPS ſome one will ſay, The religious clauſe may be underſtood of the Profeſſion, as diſtinguiſhed from the ſinful Practice, of the eſtabliſhed Church; a profeſſion which lies in an acknowledgment of the Scripture as the word of God, of the Confeſſion of faith as grounded on the Scriptures, and of Preſbyterial Church government and diſcipline.

IT may be obſerved, that ſuch an explication departs from the plain and obvious deſign of the religious Clauſe, which is, not to determine the particular points of doctrine or diſcipline that the ſwearer approves of, but to aſcertain the Church Communion to which he belongs. An obligation to Communion in that religion which is deſcribed as profeſſed within this realm and authoriſed by the laws, extends not to every particular contained in that profeſſion, or in that authoriſing; becauſe ſuch an obligation can bind one to no more than what Church Communion itſelf binds one to. But when a perſon holds communion with any Church, it does not neceſſarily follow, that he approves of

whatever evils he may ſee in her—and no Church is without her evils—ſince it is enough for warranting communion with any Church, that ſhe is evidently endeavouring to go on toward perfection, and to keep the word of Chriſt's patience. Hence it is not neceſſary to conſider the religious Clauſe as obliging the ſwearer to all the particular opinions and practices of the Church of Scotland, but to be of her Communion.

But ſuppoſing, with the Objector, that the religious Clauſe contains an obligation to ſuch particulars as are profeſſed within this Realm and authoriſed by the laws; then, we muſt conſider it as taking in the whole of what is ſo profeſſed and authoriſed without making any diſtinctions, ſince the religious Clauſe itſelf makes none. Upon this ſuppoſition, the unfairneſs of the objector's interpretation of the religious Clauſe appears, whether we conſider the religious profeſſion of the Church of Scotland at preſent, or what is authoriſed by law with regard to it.

As for the word *Profeſſion*, though it has been the ſubject of much refined Criticiſm, it occurs continually in converſation, and nobody complains of it as hard to be underſtood. A religious Profeſſion is neither more nor leſs than a perſon's or a party's declaration of what is held by that perſon or party in matters of religion. Hence a converſation becoming the Goſpel (conſidered as what we openly approve of, and conſent to obſerve) is no leſs a part of our Chriſtian Profeſſion than the articles of our Creed. Hence, too, a corrupt practice in matters of religion,—in the adminiſtration, for example, of Church government and diſcipline, when openly avowed and obſtinately perſiſted in, whatever teſtimonies are offered againſt it,—becomes, at laſt, a part of the profeſſion of that Church in which it has place. Thus Croſſing in Baptiſm and Kneeling at the Lord's

Table may justly be said to belong to the Profession of the Church of England. In like manner, those corruptions which have been so long testified against, may now be regarded as belonging to the Profession of the Church of Scotland. If, therefore, we consider the swearer of the religious Clause as engaging to what is professed in that Church, honesty seems, on that supposition,—honestly that never allows us to take an Oath which we cannot take without making some fine distinction not either expressed or plainly implied in the Oath itself, seems to regard him as professing an attachment to the principles and practices which that Church, as represented in her Judicatures, publicly holds.

IN like manner, if we consider the religious Clause as implying an approbation of particular things authorised by the laws of the land; then in order to know what is approved of in the religious Clause, we are to have recourse to these Laws only. Nor does the religious Clause warrant us to make any selection of such particulars. Hence no partial enumeration, like that in the objection, of those things with regard to religion that are authorised by the laws of Scotland, can be fairly admitted as an adequate explication of the religious Clause; since other things, as Patronages and the chief magistrate's power of Dissolving the Assemblies of the Church, are as much warranted by law as Presbyterial government. These evils, coming under the description, in the religious Clause, of being presently authorised by the laws of the land, can not be understood as excluded by the general term *true religion*: Because the meaning of the general term must be gathered from the explanatory words that follow it, and not the meaning of these words from the general term. Nor does it hinder these evils from being among the things authorised by the laws, that they are contrary to the Confes-

ſion of faith, or other ſtandards of the Church no leſs authoriſed by the laws; becauſe we are not to interpret the laws by our ideas of conſiſtency in direct oppoſition to the letter of them. But ſuppoſing this to be the caſe, it is only ſetting the laws againſt one another, and making the religious Clauſe ſelf-contradictory.

It appears, then, that the difficulty of reconciling the Clauſe in queſtion to the ſtate and teſtimony of Seceders, is far from being removed by ſuppoſing that it has not a reſpect to Church Communion, but only to ſome particular things with regard to religion authoriſed by the laws of Scotland: Becauſe we muſt not make any ſelection of particulars which the Clauſe itſelf does not make: Nor will it mend the matter to call the aſſemblage which we ourſelves have made of theſe particulars, the Conſtitution of the Church of Scotland, or by any other plauſible name whatſoever: For the difficulty ſtill recurs, whether no more is meant by the religious Clauſe than what we mean by ſuch plauſible name?

Some people ſeem to conſider the religious Clauſe as merely a renunciation of Popery. But it is hard to conceive that theſe words, *renouncing the Roman religion called Popery*, expreſs the whole deſign of the religious Clauſe, and that the reſt of it has no further determinate meaning. Is it likely, that the Clauſe would ever be deſigned for all indiſcriminately, who would renounce the Communion of the Church of Rome, whether Preſbyterians or Epiſcopalians, whether members of the Greek Church or thoſe that are denominated from Martin Luther?

On the whole, we ſhould guard againſt thoſe who take advantage of the imperfection and ambiguity of language to give a fair colouring to their opinions. "I overheard the other day," ſays Eugenio to his friend Probus, "ſome religious people

talking together. The converſation happened to turn on a Seceſſion of ſome Miniſters and private Chriſtians, which, they ſaid, was not from the eſtabliſhed Church of Scotland itſelf, but from its corruptions. Is this diſtinction applicable to the caſe of thoſe who have withdrawn from the Communion of that eſtabliſhment?" "In my opinion," ſays Probus, "it is not, unleſs departing from the Communion of a Church were the ſame thing as departing from the Corruptions of a Church. But theſe two may not only be diſtinguiſhed in thinking, but they have been ſeparated in fact. In the days of Henry VIII. the Church of England was ſeparated from the communion of the Church of Rome, without being ſeparated from the errors and ſuperſtitions of Popery. On the other hand, our Saviour and his diſciples were members of the Jewiſh Church; and yet they ſeparated themſelves from its corruptions which were then great and numerous. Degenerate as the times are, we hope there are ſtill ſome in the communion of the Church of Scotland, who deſire to keep themſelves from its prevailing evils. How far their conduct is proper, conſidering the preſent ſtate of religion in that Church, is another queſtion: But they are aiming at no more than what was attained by many witneſſes of Chriſt in former days, that is, a Seceſſion from the evils of a Church without a Seceſſion from the Church itſelf."

"PERHAPS, Eugenio, the perſons you ſpeak of meant ſome former ſtate of the Church of Scotland. But it is not the uſe that Candour would make of language, to ſpeak in ſuch terms as lead one think of the Church of Scotland *at preſent*, when ſome *former* ſtate of it is meant. Had theſe people ſaid, The Seceſſion is not from what the church of Scotland was in her pureſt times, a Critic might poſſibly have queſtioned the propriety of the word Seceſſion as here applied, but there would have been no diſpute about their meaning."

Of the Unlawfulneſs of Swearing the Religious Clauſe in ſome Burgeſs Oaths.

ABSTRACTING from the fault that many people find with the Clauſe in queſtion, as being impoſed for the purpoſe of qualifying perſons for enjoying the privileges of free citizens, the ſwearing of it does not ſeem unlawful to one who, on ſolid and ſcriptural grounds, is ſo far ſatisfied with the profeſſion of the true religion which is made by the Church referred to in the Clauſe, that he chooſes to be of her communion.

IT may be aſked, How a perſon may ſafely come under ſuch a general engagement as that in the religious Clauſe, while many things are allowed in the eſtabliſhed Church that he cannot approve of?

As to this we may obſerve, that it ſeems agreeable to the word of God, and to the example of his people in paſt ages, that one may hold Communion with a church—though in many reſpects blameable, and may profeſs his adherence to her in the moſt ſolemn manner, provided one finds the following circumſtances in her caſe:

FIRST, If there is no call, in Providence, for a Seceſſion from her communion. Thoſe who fear the Lord are attentive to the courſe of Providence, comparing it as well as their heart and way with the word. Thus they often obtain ſatisfying light as to the time and manner of ſetting about particular duties. Though the Old Teſtament œconomy was, in effect, aboliſhed upon the reſurrection of Chriſt, yet the apoſtles and other believers did not abſolutely forſake the Temple Service, till Providence clear-

ly directed them to do so. But when their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law came to be set in the fairest light, when the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles, when the Jews had *filled up their sins*, and when *wrath had come upon them to the uttermost* in the destruction of their City and Temple, no Christian was then ignorant that it was unlawful to associate with the Jews in their form of worship. In like manner, when the love of the truth as it is in Jesus, brought Luther and Calvin and others out of the church of Rome, the faithful found themselves shut up to a secession from her, Providence having raised up and spirited these great men to lead his people out of mystical Babylon. Then was that voice heard from heaven, Rev. xviii. 4. *Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.* Indeed, we are not to regard providences as the rule of our practice, for the word of Christ is our only rule; but Providences are the means or occasions of our attending to the rule; they often throw light on the rule; and they afford opportunities of putting the rule in practice. It appears then, that there are Providences—and let those who like the men of Issachar, 2 Chron. xii. 32. *have understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*, observe when these providences take place—Providences, which call us to follow the direction of the Lord's word in separating ourselves from obstinately corrupt Churches, and after which it is no longer excuseable to hold communion with such Churches, or to come under any engagements to them, like that in the religious Clause of some Burgess Oaths.

SECONDLY, If there are real evidences that a Church is endeavouring to attain a greater measure of conformity to the law of Christ. An obligation of adherence to the state of religion in a Church that is endeavouring to make progress in reformation, is,

in truth, an obligation to ſtrive againſt every remaining corruption in her: Becauſe ſo to ſtrive is, in that caſe, only to eſpouſe her cauſe; in regard that ſo far as ſhe is in a reforming ſtate, ſhe is herſelf faithfully ſtriving againſt all her own remaining corruptions. Thus we find the ſaints under the Old Teſtament, in communion with the Jewiſh Church, labouring to better her condition. Thus did our forefathers in Scotland, in the periods of our firſt and ſecond reformation. But when a Church gives abundant evidence that ſhe hates to be reformed; when every mean of reclaiming her ſerves only to increaſe her attachment to her idols; when ſhe begins to diſallow any plain or faithful teſtimony againſt her backſliding courſe, it becomes, at length, unlawful to continue in her communion, or to come under any ſuch engagement to her as that in the religious Clauſe of ſome Burgeſs Oaths.

THIRDLY, If a Church is not in any ſtated oppoſition to a teſtimony for truth in another Communion. We are not to withdraw ourſelves from the enjoyment of the ordinances of Chriſt in that Church where Providence caſts our lot, on account of ſome —nay, not on account of many corruptions remaining in her, while we know of no other purer Communion that bears teſtimony againſt thoſe corruptions. This was the caſe with the faithful members of the Jewiſh Church; who, had they forſaken the divine ordinances adminiſtered in her, could have enjoyed them no where elſe. This, too, has been the caſe of many in the Proteſtant Churches. But if it ſufficiently appears that a Church is carrying on a malignant oppoſition to a teſtimony againſt her corruptions in another and purer Communion, we need not heſitate a moment to pronounce it utterly unlawful to be of her communion, or to come under ſuch an engagement to her as that in the religious Clauſe of ſome Burgeſs Oaths.

ON the whole, If Providence calls us out of a corrupt Church, that we may not be partakers of her ſins; if ſhe is found irreclaimable after every proper mean has been uſed for her recovery; if ſhe is ſo far gone in corruption as to be a declared enemy to the cauſe of truth in another and purer communion; we ought, in theſe circumſtances, to withdraw from her, and to hold the teſtimony of Jeſus in a ſeparate communion; and, in theſe circumſtances, we cannot, without ſin, take any Oath, like the religious Clauſe in queſtion, obliging us to join in her profeſſion of the true religion: And the ſin in this matter, is greatly aggravated, if we have entered into a contrary obligation, like the bond of the Aſſociate Preſbytery, to exert ourſelves for the ſupport of *a Seceſſion Teſtimony*.

THE diſpute about the ſenſe of this Clauſe, is much againſt it. That an Oath may be ſworn *in truth, in judgment, and in righteouſneſs*, its meaning ſhould be clear and determinate. An ambiguous Oath has ever a tendency to enſnare, ſince it may be interpreted in a ſenſe that probably is never once thought of by thoſe who take it. Inſtead of being for confirmation the end of all ſtrife, an ambiguous Oath is the beginning of ſtrife. As to the religious Clauſe in queſtion, even thoſe who have written in defence of it, have not been able to ſettle its meaning with any degree of preciſion, ſometimes ſeeming to underſtand it of the true religion in the abſtract, ſometimes of the true religion as it was ſettled at the Revolution, and ſometimes only of a renunciation of Popery.

WHO can forbear lamentation, when he reflects on the mournful conſequences of the diſpute about the religious Clauſe of ſome Burgeſs Oaths? A goodly number of profeſſors, gathered out of different parts of the land to the banner of truth, made a noble ſtand againſt the corruptions of the times, till that controverſy, like ſome envious blaſt, roſe and ſcattered

them; while the honours of our Lord's Teſtimony ſeemed, for a time, to lie proſtrate in the duſt.

His *way*, however, *is in the ſea, and his path in the great waters, and his footſteps are not known.* In all caſes, we ſhould avoid any expreſſions that ſavour of a reflection on God's good Providence. Let us believe that, however the breach may be conſidered as a teſtimony of the Lord's great diſpleaſure with this generation, yet he who does all things well, who makes darkneſs light before his Church, and crooked things ſtraight, will over-rule this matter, as he did the cruel jealouſy of Joſeph's brethren, and as he has done many other death-like events in every age, to the Church's unſpeakable advantage: and that his cauſe ſhall, at length, ſhine forth with the more conſpicuous luſtre for having been a while under clouds.

ESSAY II.

Of the Seceſſion Teſtimony.

TESTIMONY is a word that frequently occurs in the ſacred writings. Sometimes it ſignifies the whole word of God, as in Iſa. viii. 20. *To the law and to the teſtimony: if they ſpeak not according to this word, it is becauſe there is no light in them.* Sometimes it has a particular reference to God's revelation which, indeed, comprehends the whole ſcope and deſign of the ſcriptures, as in John iii. 33. *He that receiveth the teſtimony of Chriſt hath ſet to his ſeal, that God is true.* This is repreſented with peculiar glory and ſolemnity, as the teſtimony of the three perſons in the Godhead, 1 John v. 7. *There are three that bear record* or teſtimony *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghoſt.* Ver. 11. *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* Such is God's teſtimony or declaration of the truth to men.

As the faith of the ſaints correſponds to the word of the goſpel,† ſo they have their teſtimony correſponding to God's. Thus we read of their teſtimony, Rev. vi. 9. *I ſaw under the altar the ſouls of them that were ſlain for the word of God, and for the teſtimony which they held.* Rev. xii. 11. *And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their teſtimony.* Thus the promiſe which the Father made

† Which is alſo called, *the faith* in Jude 3. and Rev. ii. 13.

to Chriſt, is accompliſhed, Iſa. lix. 21. *My words which I have put in thy mouth, ſhall not depart out of thy mouth, or out of the mouth of thy ſeed, nor out of the mouth of thy ſeed's ſeed, ſaith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.*

In holding this teſtimony, all the true followers of Chriſt have communion with him. Chriſt is the faithful and true Witneſs, Iſa. lv. 4. *Behold, I have given him for a Witneſs to the people, for a Leader and Commander to the people.* And his people have the ſame character, Iſa. xliii. 10. *Ye are my witneſſes, ſaith the Lord, and my ſervant whom I have choſen.* It is on account of their fellowſhip with Chriſt in adhering to and declaring this teſtimony, that the world hates them, and ſhews, on every occaſion, an irreconcileable enmity againſt them, Matth. ix. 22. *Ye ſhall be hated of all men for my name's ſake;* that is, on account of my teſtimony which ye ſhall exhibit. Hence this teſtimony is called *The word of His patience*, Rev. iii. 10. as it is an occaſion of manifeſting the long-ſuffering of our Lord himſelf toward the men of the world, while he delays to avenge his quarrel with them for their malignant oppoſition to it; an occaſion, too, of trying and exerciſing the patience of thoſe who through grace are cleaving to it.

Could men ſee the mutual relation that the ſeveral parts of the teſtimony of Chriſt bear one to another; could they apprehend the full reſult of them all: the luſtre of the divine wiſdom, holineſs, truth and mercy therein manifeſted, would immediately overpower all their objections, and, if it did not bring them heartily to receive the truth, would put them to ſhameful and everlaſting ſilence. In which caſe, it ſeems to be only for the perfection of wickedneſs in hell to make a direct oppoſition. For this reaſon, it has always been the policy of Satan and his ſervants to ſingle out

ſome particular part of Chriſt's teſtimony, to conſider that part as unconnected with the reſt, and then to employ againſt it all the force which the ſophiſtry of worldly wiſdom or the prejudices of a depraved imagination could ſupply.

WHEN this is the caſe, the part of Chriſt's teſtimony, ſo attacked, becomes, in a ſpecial manner, the teſtimony of his followers: Their character of witneſſes requires that they ſhould then openly avow that part of his teſtimony; ſince the proper time for witneſſes to confirm the truth by a public depoſition, is when the truth is controverted. This part of Chriſt's teſtimony is, indeed, *The preſent Truth*, in which we are to be eſtabliſhed, 2 Pet. i. 12. The preſent Truth has been ſometimes one part of the teſtimony of Jeſus, ſometimes another. Againſt the Jews in the apoſtles' times, it was the truth of Chriſt's divine miſſion: In the fourth century, it was the Deity of Chriſt, and the efficacy of his grace, in oppoſition to the errors of Arius and Pelagius: In the ſeventh and eighth centuries, it was the ſimplicity and ſpirituality of God's worſhip in oppoſition to the idolatrous uſe of images: During the height of Antichriſt's reign, it was the ſupreme authority of the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice in oppoſition to unwritten traditions or the commandments of men: Finally, in the laſt age when the Church of Scotland reformed from Epiſcopacy, it was the Covenanted Union of *The Iles of the ſea*, of Britain and Ireland, in the profeſſion of the doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline and government of the Church, as Chriſt has appointed them in his word. A great body of miniſters and people through theſe Lands, obtained mercy, at that time, to be faithful in holding this teſtimony; but, alas, what a falling off has there been ſince the year 1650! *The people have ſlidden back with a perpetual backſliding.* Providence, however, has never ſuffered this teſtimony to be alto-

gether dropt. Some few were always endeavouring in one way or another, to ſtand forth the aſſertors of it; till, at length, it aſſumed its preſent form of A Seceſſion Teſtimony.

Of the RISE *and* PROGRESS *of the* SECESSION TESTIMONY.

THIS denomination was occaſioned in the following manner. In the year 1732, Mr Ebenezer Erſkine delivered, before the Synod of Perth and Stirling, a ſermon in which he gave a faithful teſtimony againſt the corruptions that then prevailed in the Church of Scotland, particularly, againſt an act that the Aſſembly had paſſed the ſame year giving the election of miniſters to Proteſtant heritors and elders. The Synod judges him cenſurable for his plain dealing, and appoints him to be rebuked and admoniſhed. Mr. Erſkine, holding what he had delivered in his ſermon agreeable to the word of God, and to the ſubordinate ſtandards of the Church of Scotland, proteſts againſt the Synod's procedure, and appeals to the General Aſſembly.

THE Aſſembly confirms the ſentence of the Synod, and appoints Mr. Erſkine to be immediately rebuked. Mr. William Wilſon, Mr. Alexander Moncrief and Mr. James Fiſher join Mr. Erſkine in proteſting againſt that cenſure. It is without effect that a Committee deals with theſe four to withdraw their proteſt. The Aſſembly appoints a Commiſſion to proceed in the affair. A Commiſſion of the Aſſembly is a kind of occaſional court compoſed of ſo many ſelect members of the Aſſembly, with powers delegated from that

ſupreme judicature for ſome particular purpoſe. Such is the court before which the four are ordered to appear, and to ſignify that they are ſorry for, and retract their proteſt.

THE Commiſſion executes the Aſſembly's orders with great rigour. Diſregarding the defences of the four, not ſo much as condeſcending to hear the repreſentations in their favour from ſeveral Preſbyteries and Kirk-ſeſſions, that deputed court proceeds to ſuſpend them from the exerciſe of their miniſtry; and afterward, the ſuſpenſion being diſregarded, to declare them no longer miniſters of the Church of Scotland, abſolving the people of their reſpective pariſhes from every obligation to them in that character. Upon this, the four give in their proteſtations, intimating that they find themſelves under the neceſſity of making A SECESSION from the prevailing party in the eſtabliſhed Church; declaring themſelves, at the ſame time, zealouſly attached to the principles of the Church of Scotland according to the word of God, and our national covenants.

THE prevailing party, here meant, was made up of thoſe who took the lead in church-matters; and who found means to have always a majority on their ſide in church-courts.

THIS was the æra of the Seceſſion in Scotland. The following were at firſt the grievances which the four miniſters with their adherents, chiefly inſiſted on as grounds of it: The act of Aſſembly in 1730 forbidding reaſons of diſſent to be marked in the records of that court: The beforementioned act in 1732 concerning the election of miniſters: The ſettlement of miniſters without the conſent of the people, eſpecially as theſe violent ſettlements were countenanced and promoted by the courts of judicature: The diſcouragements that were given by theſe courts to ſuch as refuſed to ſubmit to the miniſtry of Intruders: The negligence of theſe courts as to giving any ſui ta-

ble teſtimony againſt erroneous doctrine, or as to uſing the proper means for hindering the ſpread of it: In fine, their exceſs of lenity to ſuch propagators of error as Mr. Simpſon and Mr. Campbel*; while they did not ſcruple to pronounce miniſters liable to ſevere cenſure for teſtifying againſt any particular wrong ſteps they took; thus, upon the matter, prohibiting them from bearing ſo much as a doctrinal teſtimony againſt public evils.

THUS was the banner of a Seceſſion Teſtimony ſet up; nor did the four brethren and thoſe who eſpouſed their cauſe, think it conſiſtent with

* Some of Mr Simſon's tenets were, That there is an obſcure revelation of God, ſufficient for ſalvation, made even to the heathens, who never hear the word of the goſpel; That Adam was not properly the covenant head and repreſentative of his poſterity; That there will be no ſinning in hell after the day of judgment; That the terms, neceſſary exiſtence, ſupreme Deity, and the only true God may, in ſome ſenſe, be conſidered as the perſonal property of the Father, and, of conſequence, as not belonging to the Son and the Holy Ghoſt.

Mr. Campbel held, That the ſole motives to virtuous actions are ſelf-love, intereſt and pleaſure; That without revelation, men cannot find out that there is a God; That the laws of nature are, in themſelves, ſufficient to direct men to happineſs; That the apoſtles do not ſeem to have had any notion of Chriſt's divinity at the time of his crucifixion; That it is enthuſiaſm to look for the guidance of the SPIRIT in the common affairs of life

Mr. Simſon was only ſuſpended from teaching and preaching. As Mr. Campbel's tenets (ſuch of them as were not quite overlooked) were judged to be only doubtful or too ſtrongly expreſſed, he was diſmiſſed from the bar of the General Aſſembly without any cenſure: and not only ſo, but his explanation of the mentioned propoſition about ſelf-love, That our delight in the glory of God is the chief and only motive of virtuous and religious actions, was adopted as agreeable to the ſtandards of the church.

The diſpoſition, in a church court, to favour the erroneous, will operate, in various ways, to the prejudice of ſoundneſs in the faith. The ſame Aſſembly in 1720, paſſed an act condemning ſeveral propoſitions contained in that evangelical treatiſe, The marrow of modern divinity; among which propoſitions were theſe unſpeakably precious truths: That the goſpel is a deed of gift and grant of Chriſt to mankind ſinners indefinitely; That faith is an appropriation of Chriſt to one's own ſelf in particular; That believers are wholly ſet free from the commanding power of the law as a covenant of works.

their duty, to let it fall; notwithſtanding all that the Aſſembly in 1734 did to repair the miſchiefs of the year before. It repealed, indeed, the two offenſive acts, that in 1734 about excluding reaſons of diſſent from a place in the minutes of the aſſembly, and that in 1732 giving the right of election to Proteſtant heritors and elders: But then it repealed them on this account merely, that they were not made according to former acts with regard to innovations, and were found hurtful to the Church. It likewiſe, reſtored the four brethren to the full exerciſe of the miniſtry in their reſpective pariſhes; becauſe the ſentences againſt them had been attended with diſagreeable conſequences: The Aſſembly, however, avoided remarking upon the irregularity or the injuſtice of thoſe ſentences. But the four and thoſe who had joined them, would be ſatisfied with nothing leſs than an acknowledgement of theſe and other evils they complained of, as contrary to the word of God, and as breaches of our national covenants: without that, they did not reckon themſelves warranted to drop their Seceſſion Teſtimony.

THEIR views of this teſtimony were gradually enlarged: They ſaw more and more clearly, that it was their duty to hold it faſt, and to exhibit it not only in their doctrine; but alſo in a judicial way: And for that purpoſe, they formed themſelves into an eccleſiaſtical court, called THE ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY; By the authority of which, An Act, declaration and teſtimony, An Act concerning the doctrine of Grace, and other Judicial Deeds tending to ſet ſeveral controverted truths in a fairer light, were given to the public.

It was the same TESTIMONY, *as to the* MATTER *of it, which had been Held by many in the Communion of the* ESTABLISHED CHURCH, *before the* CRISIS *in which the* SECESSION *took place.*

IT was materially the same testimony in favour of the reformation attained to in the period between 1638 and 1650, which was kept up in one way or another, from the restoration of Charles, till Mr. Ebenezer Erskine was arraigned at the bar of the General Assembly; and which was, at last, exhibited in one view, in the Judicial Testimony published in 1737. It was evidently the same testimony that was held in a state of communion with the established Church of Scotland before the Secession; though, after that event, it was placed in a fairer light, and probably was better understood. The witnesses of Christ would not forsake the communion of that Church, while she allowed them, in her judicatures, in her Synods and Assemblies, to bear a particular testimony, on every proper occasion, against her public apostacy from our covenanted reformation. Mr. Shields's large paper given in to the General Assembly in 1690; The Trust, a sermon delivered in 1721, before the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale by Mr. Wilson of Maxtoun; A Representation and Petition addressed to the General Assembly in 1732, subscribed by upwards of 1500 members of the established Church, which representation has been commonly called, The People's Testimony; these are instances of the freedom and faithfulness which the witnessing Few were

enabled to use in the Communion of that Church. But when her opposition to the testimony they held, was so direct, and so violent as no longer to suffer the exercise of such freedom and faithfulness, another way of maintaining their testimony became necessary; the way of Secession from a Church that obstinately refuses to be reclaimed. This necessity occasioned the Secession.

The SECESSION TESTIMONY *is not only for all the Purity of* RELIGION *the* CHURCH *of* SCOTLAND *has already attained, and against all Departures from that Purity; but also for making further Progress in* REFORMATION.

THE Secession Testimony is, in the first place, *A Confession of whatever purity the Church has already attained, whether with regard to doctrine, worship, discipline, or government;* agreeable to the exhortation in Philip. iii. 16. *Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing;* and to that in Rev. ii. 25. *That which ye have, hold fast till I come.* A Church ought to hold any profession she has made of the truths of Christ; for the greater agreement there is between the word and the profession of any Church, she has the more conformity (while her members are enabled to walk in a manner becoming that profession) to her glorious head. A Church ought carefully to preserve any purity of profession to which the Lord has brought her; since it is one principal end of the erection of every Church, that she should record the instances of his kindness, and *utter abundantly the memory of his great*

goodneſs: And ſurely it is no ſmall inſtance of his kindneſs, that a Church has been brought to a pure profeſſion of the truth.

THE Seceſſion Teſtimony is on the behalf of whatever conformity to the word in doctrine, worſhip, diſcipline and government, our Fathers attained; and on the behalf of whatever faithfulneſs they were enabled to in keeping the Truſt committed to them. We are by no means to confine the Teſtimony to what is mentioned in the firſt papers that were publiſhed by the four brethren, upon their ejection from the eſtabliſhment. The teſtimony given in theſe papers ſhould be conſidered as carried on in the Judicial Teſtimony, in the Acknowledgement of ſins, and other publications of the Aſſociate Preſbytery.

IT has been the Lord's uſual way (it is agreeable, indeed, to the whole courſe of Providence) to bring his people by degrees, to the knowledge of the teſtimony that he has ordained them to go forth and maintain. This was remarkably exemplified in the caſe of Luther, who taught the doctrine of juſtification by faith alone, and teſtified againſt the Romiſh Indulgences for ſome time, before he came to ſee the evil, enormous as it is, of the Papal uſurpation. Providence has wiſe purpoſes to ſerve by this method. Luther's moderation in the beginning of his oppoſition to the errors and corruptions of Popery (a moderation which roſe, in a great meaſure, from defect of knowledge) led people to examine his doctrines with candour, and prevented the Pope from exerting his whole power toward cruſhing the firſt appearances of reformation, till the cauſe of truth had acquired, by degrees, that ſtrength, that his impotent attempts againſt it were odious only and ridiculous. It was likewiſe well ordered for the Seceſſion, that the four brethren did not,

in their pleadings with the Assembly, insist on some pieces of reformation for which they afterwards contended; as it was a circumstance that made the rigour of ecclesiastical administration exercised toward them, appear the more unreasonable and oppressive.

THE Secession Testimony is frequently, in the publications of the Associate Presbytery, called A Testimony for the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Church of Scotland: This must be understood of all the conformity to the word which that Church ever attained; and has a particular respect to the period between 1638 and 1650; the period of our covenanted reformation in which the Lord so remarkably accomplished his promise, *I will give them one heart and one way.*

IN the next place, *It is a Testimony against all the opposition that has been made to that reformation; and against every departure from it.* Surely it becomes the friends of Christ to be affected with real sorrow, when they see his enemies *breaking down the carved work* of his house, *at once, with axes and with hammers*; when they see his truths openly denied, and his ordinances despised: And that sorrow will seldom fail to manifest itself in some testimony against the indignities that are done to Christ, and his cause.

SUCH a testimony is plainly implied in the full and free acknowledgment which the scripture enjoins us to make of our sins; not only of our personal sins, but of the sins of the church or nation that we belong to, of the sins not only of the present, but likewise of former generations, Levit. xxvi. 40, 41, 42. *If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary to me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them*

into the land of their enemies: if then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant.

It is evident from the history of the church and nation of Israel, that a society continues chargeable with the iniquities for which it has never been brought to any suitable exercise of repentance and humiliation; however long the time may be, since those iniquities were committed. Indeed, neither a society nor a particular person is truly and thoroughly convinced of present evils without an humbling remembrance of the past: for when the Holy Spirit convinces men effectually of sin, he shews them the poisonous nature of past evils in the prevalence of present evils. Thus it is promised in Jer. xvi. 19. that when the Gentiles, convinced of their sin and misery, should come to the Lord from the ends of the earth, they would say, *Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein is no profit:* they would see the sin of their fathers in their own. Besides, the same bitter root of a depraved nature is manifested, and God is alike dishonoured, whensoever or by whomsoever sin is committed. In this exercise we are to follow the examples of the saints, Psal. cvi. 6. *We have sinned with our fathers.* Dan. ix. 16. *For our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about them.* The ninth chapter of Nehemiah is a noble pattern for the public acknowledgment of sins.

Further, granting what was shewn in the preceding particular, that it is our duty to bear testimony for whatever conformity to the word of God the church has already attained, then it follows of course, that we ought to bear testimony against the departure which is, and has been made from that conformity to the word of God.

AGREEABLY to these truths the Secession Testimony is directed against the whole course of backsliding in the church of Scotland from the rise of the public resolutions toward the end of the year 1650 down to the present times; those resolutions by which many malignants in principle, and many of immoral practice were brought into places of civil and military trust, contrary to some commendable acts of Parliament for the regulating of the admission of persons to such places in subserviency to the reformation of religion. The Testimony we speak of, is against other evils than those which were the immediate occasion of its appearance in the form of a *Secession* Testimony; it is no less against the negligence of our ecclesiastical managers in the Revolution Settlement, than against the restraint laid upon ministerial freedom in 1733. A witness for Christ must be like the builders in Nehemiah's time, who had every man his sword girded by his side, and so builded. He is to seek the edification of the church in the way of opposing vigorously whatever is contrary to it.

IN the third place, it is a testimony *for making progress in reformation.* Every church should attend to the apostle's exhortation in Heb. vi. 1. *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.* No church is perfect; but every church ought to give satisfying evidence, that, neither enslaved by prejudices in favour of old customs or opinions, nor yet disposed to palliate or excuse her present corruptions, she is indeed aiming at perfection. As in most instances, the case of particular Christians is parallel to that of the church, it is remarkably so in this instance, according to the apostle's example, Phil. iii. 12. *Not as though I had already attained; or were already perfect: but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward*

the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt Jeſus. On the other hand, a church that is well ſatisfied with herſelf, pluming herſelf upon the rectitude of her adminiſtration, or upon the number and reputation of her members, has good reaſon to fear that ſhe is like the church of Laodicea, lukewarm, neither cold nor hot.

A CHURCH may be ſaid to be advancing in reformation as far as her attention is fixed ſingly upon the Lord Jeſus as her head, as her refuge and portion, having his word for her rule, his Spirit for her guide, and his glory for her aim; and therefore renouncing the poor advantages of worldly policy and worldly intereſt. While the church is in ſuch a ſtate, ſhe will regard the greateſt names in the world when ſet in competition with the name of Chriſt, as lighter than a ſtraw. For her own name, as far as ſhe is enabled to keep the teſtimony of Jeſus, ſhe will never dare to lay it in the balance with His.

THOUGH the Seceſſion Teſtimony contains a ſolemn approbation of all the real reformation that the church of Scotland attained in the period between 1638 and 1650; and profeſſes to adopt that reformation, as far as it ſuits with our preſent circumſtances: Yet the deſign of the Seceſſion Teſtimony is not to reſt in the attainments of our fathers; but to make further progreſs, in the way of having a ſingle regard to the word of God.

THAT the endeavours of the Aſſociate Preſbytery and of the Aſſociate Synod have not been altogether wanting in that reſpect, will be apparent to any one who carefully conſiders what they have done to explain the evangelical nature of public covenanting, to illuſtrate the duty of the witneſſes of Chriſt with regard to the civil magiſtrate, and from time to time as occaſion required, to enlarge their teſtimony in other particulars.

AMONG the numberleſs evils of our depraved nature, there is, it muſt be owned, a capricious fondneſs of novelty, of ſomething that we have never ſeen nor heard of before, without regard to intrinſic value or to real uſefulneſs; a ridiculous paſſion which has been too often gratified under the fair pretences of impartial inquiry and a ſpirit of improvement, and againſt which we have need to be very much on our guard. But we hope this evil may be eaſily known from the ſober endeavours of the church of Chriſt to make progreſs in the knowledge and profeſſion of the truth, and to cleave more cloſely to the way of the Lord. Her endeavours toward theſe ends will always be diſtinguiſhed in the following reſpects.

FIRST, The church, in that caſe, looks to the word of God as the only ſource, whence ſhe is to derive all her new informations with regard to truth or duty. New pieces of real reformation, whether it be that of particular Chriſtians or that of the church, are always the effect of greater diligence in ſearching the Scriptures. See an example of this in Neh. xiii. 1. *On that day they read in the book of Moſes in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite ſhould not come into the congregation of God for ever.* We have the conſequence of this diſcovery in ver. 3. *Now it came to paſs, when they had heard the law, that they ſeparated from Iſrael all the mixed multitude.* Thus every propoſal of taking a new ſtep in reformation ſhould be either the expreſs words or the neceſſary conſequence of *what is found written;* and being from ſuch a ſource, it cannot be rejected without an affront to the authority of God interpoſed in his word. Jealous of the luxuriance of our imaginations; jealous even of our opinions as to what is proper or uſeful in matters of religion, we ſhould be anxiouſly careful to keep without wavering to the Scrip-

tures of truth as our only rule of truth and of duty.

SECONDLY, A church that really is making progress in reformation, thankfully acknowledges what measure of conformity to the word she has attained, and sincerely endeavours to hold it fast; agreeably to the charge that our Lord gives to the church in Philadelphia, Rev. iii. 11. *Behold I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast; that no man take thy crown.* A person cannot be said to be making any progress in the study of holiness, who, when he begins to be diligent in the practice of some duties formerly neglected, grows, at the same time, negligent as to other duties which he was once careful to perform: he forgets, in that case, to hold fast what he had. The same case may easily be supposed with regard to the church.

BESIDES, in all our endeavours after reformation, the Scripture calls us to have regard to the examples and attainments of those who have gone before us. These examples may even contribute to our information as to what we do not know. Song i. 8. *If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of thy flock; and feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents.* The several parts of divine truth are uniform, consistent, and serve to recommend each other: they are so much of a piece that they are called *one way*; and with regard to the examples of those who have gone before us, they are called the *old way*, Jer. vi. 16. *Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls.* Our new advances in reformation should be so much of a piece with the examples of the Lord's people in former times, as to be, on the matter, no other than our walking forward in the same old path.

ON the whole; the new creature, which is begotten of God with the word of truth, wreſtles againſt whatever is oppoſite to the word: nay, it never was a queſtion with any man ſo far as he was a new creature, whether on proper occaſions, he ſhould give a faithful teſtimony againſt all ſin and all error in himſelf or in others. It is true indeed, believers are not all enlightened alike: one is better acquainted with ſome parts; another with other parts of truth and duty. Some have made greater, ſome leſs proficiency in the knowledge of Chriſt. In truth, the moſt eminent ſaints, while here, are deſcribed rather as panting after the knowledge of Chriſt, than as having actually obtained it. Hear the apoſtle Paul declare what was his deſire and his conſtant aim, Phil. iii. 10. *That I may know him, and the power of his reſurrection, and the fellowſhip of his ſufferings.* The wiſeſt in this reſpect, acknowledge themſelves to be fools: though all true Chriſtians have ſo much experimental knowledge of Chriſt as makes them look inceſſantly to the Lord, that he would grant them a more abundant ſupply of *the Spirit of wiſdom and revelation in the knowledge of Chriſt.*

ALL this is true; but then it is likewiſe true, that it is the native diſpoſition of the new creature to cleave to the whole of God's revealed will, and eſpecially to thoſe truths and duties, againſt which Satan, the world and the fleſh make the moſt violent oppoſition. Hence we ought to commune with our own hearts, and to examine particularly how we ſtand affected to ſuch truths and ſuch duties. People may imagine they cordially receive a great deal of God's word, while they ſecretly wiſh to be excuſed from a ſtrict adherence to ſome part of it, which more evidently ſtrikes againſt their beloved idols. The heart is very deceitful; it uſes every artifice to diſguiſe the true cauſe of their indifference or oppoſition to ſuch parts of

God's word, imputing it to the obscurity of the word itself, to the little importance of such a truth or duty, to the circumstances in which divine Providence has placed them, to any thing, in short, rather than to the enmity of the carnal mind against God: a striking verification of what our Lord says in John iii. 20. *Every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds be reproved.* It is, therefore, a matter of great delicacy and importance in what manner we behave with respect to those points of truth or duty, which meet with peculiar opposition from Satan, the world and the flesh; those points which are, in a particular manner, the testimony of Christ; those points on which the dispute between him and Belial is most doubtful to the eye of carnal sense and reason; those points which above others, occasion both the old and the new nature to manifest themselves; the one by a propensity to neglect and oppose them; the other by a propensity to cleave to them with purpose of heart.

Let us encourage ourselves in the Lord to hold fast the Testimony of Jesus. It is our indispensible duty to do so. This testimony is a sacred trust that the Lord hath committed to us; a banner which he hath given us to display because of the truth. To do so is practicable. The testimony of Christ has been held by multitudes who have gone before us. The hundred forty and four thousand who stood with the Lamb on Mount Sion were a glorious company of witnesses. However weak and unworthy, let us follow them in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only. From the snares of the world, from the devices of Satan, and which is the worst of all, from our depraved nature we have, no doubt, many and formidable difficulties to encounter in keeping the word of Christ's patience. Worldly wisdom is ever suggesting,

that we are never to get over them ; and repreſents the witneſſes of Chriſt as a number of ſilly fools or deſperate madmen. On the other hand, the word of God aſſures us, that theſe mountains are a plain before our Zerubbabel and his followers ; that the faithful witneſſes of Chriſt ſhall threſh the mountains and beat them ſmall as chaff ; and that in all theſe things, they are more than conquerors through him that loved them. The wiſe men of the world are of opinion, that the poor deſpicable handful of Chriſt's witneſſes will ſoon be diſperſed, and his teſtimony for ſuch particular truths fall to the ground. But as we are to believe God rather than man, ſo we are to be verily perſuaded, that Chriſt and the Spirit are always in the church to maintain that ſtandard, and that all the efforts of earth and hell againſt it, ſhall ſerve only to make it appear more glorious, Mat. xxvii. 20. Acts v. 32. Iſa. lix. 18. In fine, as it is one of the ſweeteſt comforts to have the teſtimony of our conſciences that we deal faithfully in this matter, ſo there is not a nobler and more honourable character under heaven, than that of A WITNESS FOR CHRIST.

ESSAY III.

Of the NATURE *of* PUBLIC COVENANTING.

THIS duty is misrepresented in various ways: some decry it as a yoke of bondage contrary to our Christian liberty; others insist that it is not necessary, because we covenant, on the matter, when we partake of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Perhaps the following observations, if attended to, with a single dependence on the Spirit of truth, may be of use to obviate such prejudices.

COVENANTING has many things in common with other ordinances, that shew it to be equally agreeable as they, to the nature of the gospel-dispensation. There is no duty, which, rightly performed, lies more in the exercise of faith than the duty of covenanting. It is by faith that we lay hold of the new covenant as it stands fast in Christ. But when we avouch the Lord to be our God in covenanting, we solemnly profess to lay hold of the covenant of grace, since he cannot be our God (nor the God of any of fallen mankind otherwise than according to the covenant of grace. How can we engage to obey the law otherwise than as it is the law of Christ, or as it is made over to us in such great and precious promises as these; *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall never depart from me*? So

far as perſons are ſuitably excerciſed in going about the duty of covenanting, they have a real perſuaſion that they owe their all, their ſtrength for duty, their ſupport and perſeverance in it, and the crown of righteouſneſs at the end of their courſe, to the grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. All our purpoſes, vows and engagements are only the ſtaff of a broken reed, on which if a manlean, it will go into his hand and pierce it, if they are, at bottom, either more or leſs than a confident truſt that the Lord, through his infinite mercy in Chriſt, will deal well with us according to his word: one cannot be a true covenanter but as far as he is a true believer.

IN ſocial covenanting as in our public prayers, in our public praiſes, and in our partaking of the Sacraments, there is an open confeſſion of our faith. In all theſe duties, we ſtand forth and declare, that we are not aſhamed of our confidence, nor of the cauſe of Chriſt. In other duties as in prayer, in receiving Baptiſm or the Lord's Supper, as well as in covenanting, we come under obligations to be the Lord's. In each of theſe duties, we are ſtrictly bound to abide by his truths and ways: in prayer we call him *Our Father*, and expreſs our deſire to follow him as dear children.

IN receiving Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper, we ſolemnly profeſs that we ly under infinite obligations to the Lord, as the God whoſe we are and whom we ſerve, and who ſeals to us all the benefits of the new covenant in thoſe ordinances.

IT is obvious, that the circumſtance of many concurring in one action, is common to covenanting with other goſpel ordinances. Both when we go about the duty of covenanting, and when we receive the Lord's Supper, we may juſtly ſay, *We being many, are one body.*

SUCH are the things that ſocial covenanting has in common with other public ordinances.

But we are likewise to observe, that covenanting as it is pointed out to us in the word, has so many things peculiar to it, as shew that, in order to answer the rule that the Lord has given us, it is not enough that we covenant, so far as covenanting is implied in our observing of other divine institutions. These peculiarities lead us to go about covenanting in a distinct and formal manner, as we observe fasting, the Lord's Supper, or any other ordinance of Christ.

By things peculiar to covenanting we do not mean things that are no way implied in other duties; we mean that they have not place in other duties in the same manner as they have place in covenanting: so a person may be said to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God in reading or hearing the word, in meditating on it; or in prayer; but in these duties they cannot be said to do so sacramentally as in the Lord's Supper.

In the first place, there is necessary in the regular performance of this duty, a formal deed of conveyance wherein we give ourselves to the Lord, corresponding to the gospel which is God's deed of gift and grant of Christ to sinners of mankind. Several circumstances, characterizing a legal deed, are obvious in the examples of covenanting set before us in scripture. One circumstance is a form of words ratified by the consent of all the covenanters, in which they acknowledge the Lord to be their God, and themselves to be his people, binding themselves at the same time, to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless. Josh. xxiv. 18. *The people said, We will serve the Lord, for he is our God.* They repeat the same again and again ver. 21, and 24. It is added in ver. 25. *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.* That a form of words was used

is no leſs apparent in other examples of covenanting, 2 Chron. xv. 12. 13. & xxx. 31. Neh. x. 29, 38,—33. Nor is it unworthy of notice that this form of words is called a covenant, or in the original languages, BERITH, and by the Septuagint, ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ; for whoever is acquainted with Hebrew and Greek, will grant that it is natural to underſtand theſe words of a legal deed or conſtitution.

THE Lord is ſaid to make a covenant with us, when he exhibits and makes over to us the covenant of grace, Iſa. lv. 3. *I will make an everlaſting covenant with you, even the ſure mercies of David.* In like manner, we are ſaid to make a covenant with him, when we lay hold of the New Covenant according to that exhibition of it, particularly, when we do it in the moſt ſolemn and formal manner as in the ordinance under our conſideration. *It is in mine heart*, ſaid Hezekiah, *to make a covenant with the Lord God of Iſrael.* Hence the matter of theſe deeds or inſtruments that are drawn up for public covenanting, ſhould be no other than an abſtract of God's covenant of grace; including indeed, a declaration that every covenanter heartily conſents to it. Agreeable to this view of the matter is the promiſe, Jer. li. 4, 5. *In thoſe days, and in that time, ſaith the Lord, the children of Iſrael ſhall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they ſhall go and ſeek the Lord their God. They ſhall aſk the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, ſaying, Come and let us join ourſelves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that ſhall not be forgotten;* or *the perpetual covenant*, that is, the covenant of grace mentioned in the thirty third chapter of this book, *ſhall not be forgotten.* In covenanting we join ourſelves to the Lord, as the Borrower by a bill or ſome other legal deed, binds himſelf to the Lender for the reſtoration of

the loan *. But it is plainly our duty as well as it was that of church members under the Old Teſtament to join ourſelves to the Lord, and to be his people. Whatever primary reſpect this paſſage may have had to the return of the Jewiſh captives from Babylon, there is nothing to hinder us from applying it to ourſelves. We are by no means to confine the particular application of the promiſes to thoſe who were firſt to have the benefit of them.

In every civilized nation legal deeds are confirmed by witneſſes and ſubſcriptions. We have both theſe in our ſcripture examples of covenanting, Joſh. xxiv. 22. *And Joſhua ſaid unto the people, Ye are Witneſſes againſt yourſelves, that ye have choſen you the Lord to ſerve him. And they ſaid we are Witneſſes.* Neh. ix. 38. *Becauſe of all this we make a ſure covenant and write it, and our princes, levites and prieſts ſeal unto it.* Hence covenanting, or our ſaying in the moſt expreſs and public manner, I am the Lords, is repreſented in Iſa. xliv. 5. as our *ſubſcribing with the hand unto the Lord, and ſirnaming ourſelves by the name of Iſrael.* Our beſt name by nature is that of ſinners; but conſidered as perſons that ſubſcribe with the hand unto the Lord, in this ſolemn ordinance, we have a new name given us, we are ſirnamed the Lord's peculiar people, ſought out, and not forſaken: a great encouragement to perſons joining in ſo delightful an exerciſe.

In order to obviate ſome objections that are commonly offered againſt our application of this and ſome other texts of the Old Teſtament to the practice of covenanting under the New Teſtament, two things ſhould be attended to. Firſt, We are never to depart from the literal ſenſe of a text, unleſs we ſee it neceſſary to do ſo from the context,

* This is the exact import of the word in the original, which is rendered, *Let us join ourſelves to the Lord.*

from ſome other ſcripture truth, or in fine, from the nature of the thing. Secondly, Becauſe ſeveral expreſſions in a ſentence are clearly to be underſtood figuratively, it will not follow, excepting in an allegory ſuch as Ezekiel's viſion, the Revelation, or the Song of Solomon, that we muſt depart from the literal meaning of any other part or expreſſion in that ſentence. An allegory is a continued figure, and therefore it is contrary to the nature of it, that one part of it ſhould be underſtood figuratively, and another literally. But every one knows, that for the ſake of elegance and energy, figures are frequently employed in the common language of mankind which for the moſt part is meant to be underſtood literally. Hence no one can reaſonably be ſurprized, that in peruſing the writings of the prophets, he ſhould continually meet with paſſages that are to be taken partly literally and partly figuratively. An example will make our meaning plain. Zeph. iii. 9, 10. *I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call on the name of the Lord, to ſerve him with one conſent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my ſuppliants, even the daughter of my diſperſed ſhall bring mine offering.* Here the expreſſions *pure language* and *bringing mine offering* are to be underſtood figuratively; yet it does not follow that the expreſſions *to ſerve the Lord, and to call on his name,* are ſo to be underſtood. The truth is, the prophets commonly deſcribe the worſhip of God that was to obtain under the new Teſtament in terms that are applicable to the forms of worſhip under the old, which, we know, were partly moral, partly ceremonial. It is obvious, in that caſe, that the terms which are applicable to what was moral, muſt be taken literally; while theſe that are applicable to what was ceremonial, muſt be taken figuratively. The laſt chapter of Iſaiah and the laſt of Zechariah are illuſtrious examples of this obſervation.

APPLYING theſe two things to the above-mentioned paſſage; though it is true that neither the church nor her members are now called Jacob and Iſrael; why may not a church-member ſay, *I am the Lord's*, as well under the New Teſtament as under the Old? Why may he not *ſubſcribe with the hand*, ſignifying that he deſires it to ſtand on record, that he was a witneſs for the cauſe of Chriſt? Why may he not give the moſt public and ſolemn aſſurance that he is not aſhamed of the name, the truths and ordinances of Chriſt, even as a member of the Jewiſh church was not aſhamed to *call himſelf by the name of Jacob*, and to *ſirname himſelf by the name of Iſrael?*

IN the ſecond place, Vowing to the Lord our God may be conſidered as one of the peculiarities of covenanting. Vowing, or devoting ourſelves and all we have to the Lord may be *implied* in other ordinances; but this is *called* vowing. Our exerciſes of reading and hearing the word ſhould never be without prayer; yet no body conſiders prayer as the ſame thing with reading and hearing the word. In like manner, though we may be conſidered as making vows in our Baptiſm or in the communion of the Lord's Supper, we are ſtill to diſtinguiſh theſe ordinances from the ordinance of vowing. We read in Scripture of particular vows by which perſons of their own accord, came under obligations with regard to ſomething that was otherwiſe indifferent. Of this kind were the vow of the Nazarites under the Old Teſtament, Num. vi. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. and Paul's vow under the New, Acts xviii. 18. Public covenanting ſtill anſwers the ſame purpoſe as theſe vows did. In vowing, ſome particular thing was ſpecified as a ſign or evidence of the perſon's devoting himſelf to the Lord: Thus Jacob devoted the tenth of his ſubſtance to the Lord, avouching him to be his God. In the ſame manner, when public covenanting is rightly

gone about, there is always an explicit engagement to faithfulneſs in oppoſing ſome prevailing evil, or in cleaving to ſome deſpiſed truth or duty, according to our preſent circumſtances, as an evidence and public pledge of our ſincerity in giving ourſelves to the Lord. Thus in Pſal. lxxvi 11. *Vow and pay unto the Lord your God; let all that be round about him bring preſents unto him that ought to be feared.* We may conſider the former part of the verſe as reſpecting the dedication of ourſelves to the Lord, which was implied in every vow under the old Teſtament; and the latter part as a ſign or token of ſuch dedication; which ſign or token is varied according to circumſtances *.

SWEARING *to the Lord* is undoubtedly a phraſe put for Covenanting in the old Teſtament. But that phraſe and *Vowing* are uſed indifferently for the ſame thing in Iſai. xix. 18, 21.

WHEN Vowing is ſpoken of, as in the two laſt mentioned paſſages, without reſtriction to any particular thing, or as of perpetual obligation on all the hearers of the word, it is to be underſtood of Covenanting or devoting ourſelves to the Lord; which may be done either by individuals in the cloſet, or by a number of people jointly and publicly. So we may underſtand Pſal. cxxxii. 2. *How David ſware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob.*

† THIS token, pledge, or whatever other name may be given it, was often under the old Teſtament, an engagement to ſomething of an indifferent nature, to ſomething which the divine law leaves at the option of perſons to do or not to do. Hence it is ſaid in Deut xxiii. 22. *But if thou ſhalt forbear to vow, it ſhall be no ſin in thee.* This kind of pledge has been and may be uſed under the new teſtament diſpenſation, as in Paul's vow abovementioned; but it ſeems more agreeable to the ceremonial nature of the old. That the token or pledge we ſpeak of, may be alſo an engagement to a much neglected moral duty is clear from the ſcriptural precepts and examples of Covenanting; which engagement is, indeed, the moſt ſuitable to the new Teſtament diſpenſation.

A THIRD thing that serves to characterise this duty is the formality of an oath, 2 Chron. xv. 24, 25. *And they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath.* The following passages deserve particular consideration.

THOU *shalt swear, The Lord liveth in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory*, Jerem. iv. 2. It is true, the Lord is here speaking to Israel; but not to Israel only. Every one who acknowledges, that *whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning*, will grant that the first verse is to us as well as to Israel; and why not the second? Besides, the connection between the former and the latter clause of the verse leads us to understand both as applicable to the Gentiles. It is usual in scripture to lay down a rule, and then to add a prophecy or promise with respect to the obedience that should be yielded to that rule. See examples in Isai. xlv. 23, 24. Jerem. iii 14, 15, 16, 22. and various other places. The connection, therefore, between the two members of the verse; a connection which is also hinted by the particle *and* prefixed to the last; intimates, that the nations were to bless themselves and glory in Christ, professing that they did so with the solemnity of an oath. This rule was complied with in Nehemiah's time; but the completion of the prophecy belongs to the glory of the new Testament dispensation.

To indulge a reflection on the beauty of this verse; it is agreeable to observe how the prophet having represented the matter of Covenanting, suitably to the circumstances of the ancient Israelites, as an adherence to this truth, *The Lord liveth*, in opposition to the practices of the Nations who worshipped dead idols; is, of a sudden,

rapt into future times, and sees the people of those very nations; sees not merely individuals, but whole states and commonwealths engaging in the duty of Covenanting; the purport of their oath, agreeably to the superior light of the new Testament dispensation being to this effect, That they should bless themselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in him should they glory.

IN *that day, shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts.* Isa. xix. 18. Agreeably to what is remarked above concerning the style of the prophets, though it is true, that *the language of Canaan, the altar in the midst of the land*, and the *doing sacrifice and oblation to the Lord* are here to be understood figuratively, it does not, therefore, follow, that *swearing to the Lord of hosts* is to be so understood. It is plain, that several other expressions in this passage, are to be taken literally: Such as, *they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send a saviour and a great one to deliver them: And the Lord shall be known to the Egyptians, and the Egytians shall know the Lord in that day: They shall return to the Lord, and he shall be intreated of them.*

IT is agreed on all hands, that the worship of God in his church is here meant, and that the language is such as would apply to the worship of the old Testament. But it was never shewn (hardly indeed ever attempted to be shewn) that swearing to God was a ceremonial institution which was to cease at the death of Christ. It remains, therefore, that we understand it literally of accompanying a pure profession of religion or *Speaking the language of Canaan*, with the solemnity of an oath.

WITH regard to the accomplishment of this prophecy, we are well assured that Christianity was planted in Egypt soon after our Lord's as-

cenſion. By the conſent of antiquity, Peter and Mark are ſaid to have laboured in propagating the goſpel there. Hiſtory gives us very few particulars concerning the church of Egypt. Here, however, Egypt may be conſidered as repreſenting the Gentile nations in general. Beſides, though this prophecy may, in a meaſure, be already fulfiled, probably the moſt eminent completion of it is yet to come.

I HAVE *ſworn by myſelf, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteouſneſs, and ſhall not return, that unto me every knee ſhall bow, every tongue ſhall ſwear*, Iſa. xl. 23. The univerſal terms, here uſed, may be conſidered as reſpecting the ſubmiſſion of men to the Lord Chriſt; their ſubmiſſion abſtractly taken, without regard to the quality of it, whether willing or conſtrained; that ſubmiſſion, in ſhort, which is the general and final effect aſcertained in theſe words, and in reſpect of which the apoſtle applies the paſſage to the day of judgment when all ſhall be ſeen ſubjected to Chriſt, Rom. xiv. 10, 11. *We ſhall ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt. For it is written, as I live ſaith the Lord, every knee ſhall bow to me, and every tongue ſhall confeſs to God.* But it is certain, that many paſſages of the old Teſtament are applied in the new, not according to the full comprehenſion of their meaning, but only according to ſome particular part of it. So the ſaying of Iſaiah, *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our ſorrows*, is applied in Matt. viii. 17. to the cures our Lord performed in the days of his fleſh; and that of Zechariah, *They ſhall look on him whom they have pierced*, is applied in John xx. 37. to the piercing of his ſide with a ſpear. Neither of theſe texts, ſurely, can reaſonably be reſtrained to the occaſion on which they are quoted by the evangeliſts. Hence we cannot certainly conclude

from the uſe the apoſtle in the abovementioned place, makes of this paſſage, that it is to be confined to that ſubmiſſion alone which ſhall be given to Chriſt at the laſt day. One thing, however, we may learn from the apoſtle's manner of rendering the words of the prophet; That the ſwearing here meant, is a confeſſion of Chriſt's name. But what other ſwearing than that in public Covenanting, is ſo properly an explicit confeſſion of Chriſt's name?

IT appears, then, that theſe phraſes *bowing the knee* and *ſwearing to Chriſt*, in all the comprehenſion of their meaning, denote the grateful homage and willing ſubmiſſion which the Lord requires in his word. In which ſenſe the univerſal terms refer to believers only; for who are the perſons of whom it is ſaid, *every tongue ſhall ſwear?* They are ſuch as comply with the call, *Look unto me, and be ye ſaved, all the ends of the earth.* They make a profeſſion of their faith with the ſolemnity of an oath, each of them ſaying, *Surely in the LORD* alone *have I righteouſneſs and ſtrength.* In truth, as there are greater or leſs meaſures of faith, ſo the profeſſion of believers may correſpond, in a greater or leſs degree, to the word of God. A profeſſion of faith may be without an oath; but accompanied with an oath, it is more ſuitable to the manner in which God exhibits to us the covenant of grace. Well may we ſwear to the Lord for his declarative glory, ſince he ſwears to us for the increaſe of our faith and comfort.

THUS the duty of public Covenanting is characteriſed by a formal deed of conveyance, by vowing, and by ſwearing to the Lord.

THOUGH we come under the ſtrongeſt obligations to be the Lord's in receiving Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper; yet theſe ordinances are diſtinguiſhed in their nature from the ordinance of

Covenanting, vowing or swearing to the Lord. Baptism and the Lord's supper are the public seals which God himself, in condescension to our weakness, puts to the covenant of grace: on the other hand, the duty we speak of is the public seal which according to the precepts and promises of the word, we ourselves put to that sure and well ordered covenant. Faith is *the setting to of our seal that God is true*, John iii. 33. Reader, do that in as express and formal a manner as the church of christ ever did, and you do all that we mean by public covenanting. Baptism and the holy supper are pledges from the Lord himself that He is our God and Father in Christ; but our covenanting is a public pledge, on our part, that we are his willing people.

PERHAPS some will say, we cannot give any greater public assurances of our being the Lord's people, than those we give in partaking of Baptism and the Lord's supper.

BUT the Lord may require other assurances which, though not greater, are of a different kind. If some generous benefactor promises to grant us a very great favour, adding only, that he expects we will render him some piece of service as an evidence of our gratitude; if he also condescends to give us some pledge or token to assure us that he will do as he hath said; our acceptance, no doubt, of such a pledge may justly be construed as a declaration that we believe his word, and desire to make the grateful return. But should he require us to give him before witnesses, some pledges, on our part, of our sincerity in believing his word, and in resolving to make the grateful return; would honesty, in that case, suffer us to refuse such pledges? or would we have the impudence to tell the generous benefactor, that we could see no reason for our giving any other assurance of sincerity than

our acceptance of the pledge with which he accompanied his promise? Now, Baptism and the Lord's Supper correspond to the pledge on the part of the generous benefactor; Covenanting corresponds to the assurances which he requires on our part.

IT is indeed very commonly said, That Baptism and the Lord's Supper are oaths and vows. The three following things seem to be the principal grounds of that opinion.

1. THESE ordinances are called Sacraments from the ancient *Sacramentum* or military oath of the Romans. But besides that we are not to regard terms, like this, of men's devising any farther than they are proper to express the meaning of scripture; it is not the only signification of the word *Sacramentum*. According to Varus, it was used by civilians for the money which each of the parties in a law-suit laid down in the court: the pledge of the party who gained the cause was restored to him; that of the other was forfeited to the public treasury. In the writings of the Fathers, and in the oldest Latin translations of the new Testament the word *Sacramentum* is used for *a mystery*. There seems to be no impropriety in applying the name in either of these two senses, to the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. "Indeed," says a judicious reformer, "it "is abundantly clear that the ancients, when "they gave the name *sacramenta* to those ordi-"nances, had little or no regard to the accepta-"tion of the word in the classical writers. They "devised a signification of their own suitable to "the nature of those divine institutions to which "they applied the term: with them *Sacraments* "meant no more than sacred signs or pledges. "Much the same liberty has been taken with the "Latin word *fides*; which in the purest writers "of that language, signifies faithfulness to one's

"promise: however, it is now constantly used "by theological writers for a certain persuasion "of the truth. By a similar process, the *Sacra-* "*mentum* which originally signified the obligati- "on of the soldier to his commander, was "brought to signify the obligation of the com- "mander to the soldier: for the sacraments are "the solemn assurances which the Lord himself "gives us, that he will be our God, and that "we shall be his people." Agreeable to Calvin's opinion is the definition, in our Shorter Catechism, of the general nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: "A Sacrament is a holy ordi- "nance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible "signs Christ and the benefits of the new cove- "nant are represented, sealed and applied to "believers."

2. ANOTHER thing that seems to favour this opinion is, the common practice of parents coming under solemn engagements at the Baptism of their children; which are called baptismal engagements, though to Baptism they do not seem to be otherwise necessary than as they evidence the person to be a professing Christian parent whose children have a right to that ordinance. These engagements have their use in their own place; like the law, they are good, if a man use them lawfully; but to consider them as an essential part of Baptism is a very great abuse of them. The Lord says to Abraham concerning Circumcision, *It shall be a token of the covenant between me and you*; and the apostle calls it *A seal of the righteousness of the faith*; but never is it called a vow or an oath. Now Baptism is of the same nature as the ordinance of Circumcision. We are said to be *baptised into Jesus Christ, into his death and burial*, Rom. vi. 3, 4. that is, our partaking of Christ, and of the benefits resulting from his death and burial are sealed to our faith in Baptism. That this is the

true meaning of the abovementioned expreſſions appears, if we conſider that the ſcope of the apoſtle in that chapter is to repreſent the obligations to Goſpel-holineſs, not thoſe of oaths and vows, but thoſe ariſing from the principles and priveleges of our new ſtate in Chriſt.

3. BUT the principal thing that ſeems to lead perſons into the notion, that Baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper are oaths and vows, is this, that the ſtrongeſt obligation to new obedience is implied ‡ in our participation of theſe ordinances. Our approach in them to the Lord who is *glorious in holineſs*, renders it abſolutely neceſſary that we be careful to ſanctify ourſelves. The language of every partaker ſhould be, "I love "him who ſhews me by theſe pledges and ſen- "ſible ſigns, that he firſt loved me: and what "ſhall I render to the Lord for all his bene- "fits?" But ſtill our reſolutions and engagements are to be diſtinguiſhed from what is properly our act of receiving Baptiſm or the Lord's ſupper; though they are, no doubt, implied in that act, and follow naturally upon it. Nor is any one to look on this as only a nice diſtinction of little importance; it is the pernicious error of the greateſt perverters of the goſpel, that the partaking of the Lord's Supper is only our ſwearing over the elements of bread and wine, that we have a great veneration for the memory of Jeſus Chriſt as a perſon of unſpotted virtue, and that we ſhall always be careful to imitate his example. On the contrary, we are to hold it faſt as a precious truth, That our partaking in

‡ IT is indeed no ſmall warrant for the diſtinct obſervation of any thing that has been obſerved diſtinctly by the church of Chriſt in former times, That the matter of it is implied in ſome other divine ordinances. For example, if in receiving Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper, we do materially the ſame thing which the Iſraelites did in their public covenanting; why ſhould we ſcruple to be as diſtinct and explicit in that matter, as they were? for they too, had other ordinances in which the duty of covenanting was implied.

faith of the Lord's supper is nothing less than the real partaking of a crucified Christ. When we set about the observance of that solemn ordinance, we should seek the holy Spirit to work in us a real persuasion, that as we receive the bread and wine according to Christ's appointment, so we receive Christ himself as made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. In this ordinance the Lord says, Take ye; and right communicating lies in our taking according to the Lord's command. Thus though it is necessary to observe the harmony and close connection among the ordinances of Christ, it is dangerous to confound one with another: to hold Communicating to be the same as Covenanting savours much of a Socinian error with regard to the Lord's Supper†.

Upon the whole, it appears that covenanting has so much in common with other ordinances of the New Testament as may serve to shew that it is equally suitable as they to the nature of the gospel-dispensation; while, on the other hand, it has so much to distinguish it from other ordinances as may serve to warrant us in observing it distinctly and formally as we do Baptism, the Lord's Supper, fasting and prayer.

From the preceding observations we see, that it tends to mislead us in examining the warrants for public Covenanting to consider swearing as the only formality or distinction of that duty. For it has other characteristics than swearing. Giving ourselves to the Lord, and promising an honest adherence to God's word, particularly to such parts of it as meet with the greatest opposition; these two things may be some how con-

† The candid reader will see that the above observations with regard to Baptism and the Lord's supper are not to be understood as determining what is comprehended in these ordinances, but only as respecting the formal nature and distinguishing characteristics of them.

tained in other duties; but it is denied that they characteriſe them as they do Covenanting. Theſe two things are eſſential to this duty: but though ſwearing and ſubſcribing are highly proper and warrantable; we have reaſon to believe that Covenanting has often been gone about without them. The church's obſervance of a particular duty is ſometimes more ſometimes leſs adequate to the divine rule. It is ſaid of the paſſover, that before Hezekiah's reign *it had not been kept for a long time in ſuch ſort as it was written.*

Of the Character which Perſons bear in PUBLIC COVENANTING.

SINCE God, and not man, is the great party with whom immediately we have to do in the Covenanting of which we treat; ſince it is an avouching of the Lord to be our God; it ſeems evident, that it is a religious duty to be obſerved by the Church only; by the Church as a ſociety founded on the covenant of grace‡.

‡ IF it is an advantage inſeparable from the general nature of ſociety, that the members of it may enter into a covenant for the preſervation or advancement of whatever is the object of their common intereſt and endeavours; we cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe the Church of Chriſt, the nobleſt ſociety that was ever formed, to be precluded from that advantage. Were church members to covenant on this principle alone, they would be chargeable with no ſuperſtition; for in that caſe, they would be only proſecuting the purpoſes of the divine command according to which they have been erected into a viſible church or *Civitas Dominica*; they would only be making an explicit declaration of what is implied in the formation of every ſociety; in fine, they would only be putting *the ſocial compact* into words, and applying it to a particular caſe. There would be no parallel between ſuch covenanters and thoſe who uſe the ſign of the croſs in baptiſm, kneel at the Lord's

It is competent to the church only or to her members to go about ſpiritual duties; and ſuch are all thoſe duties the immediate end of which is ſomething ſpiritual. The glory of God ſhould, no doubt, be the higheſt end of all our actions, whether civil or religious. But the end we have moſt immediately in view, ſubordinate to the higheſt, muſt be according to the nature of our actions; that is, our civil actions muſt have ſome worldly or political advantage for their object; and our religious actions muſt have the good of our own ſouls and of the Church for their object.

Now what is the immediate end of Covenanting? is it only for the promoting of trade, of manufactures, of agriculture? is it only for making us wealthy at home, or formidable abroad? No; but as Moſes expreſſes it, *that we may walk in the Lord's ways, that we may keep his ſtatutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and hearken to his voice*; that we may be engaged to follow the Lord fully, and to aſſiſt one another in learning the truths and in performing the duties of the word. Though upright Covenanting may be conducive to our temporal happineſs, this like the other ways of wiſdom being pleaſantneſs and peace; yet the direct and immediate object of covenanting is the advancement of our ſpiritual intereſts.

Thus Covenanting being a duty of a ſpiritu-

table, and keep ſaints' days. Theſe things are neither commanded of God, nor do they neceſſarily belong to the general nature of any thing that he commands: But when the Lord enjoins Chriſtians to walk together in the fellowſhip of the goſpel, the injunction implieth, as what neceſſarily follows from the nature of ſociety, that they ought, occaſionally, to give one another all proper aſſurances of their ſtedfaſt adherence to the truths and ordinances of Chriſt, to thoſe, eſpecially, which are at preſent the moſt diſregarded; ſuch aſſurances, we mean, as are common to ſocieties of every kind; and ſurely covenants, oaths and ſubſcriptions were never peculiar to any kind of ſociety.

al nature, it is the buſineſs of the church alone, a ſpiritual ſociety, to ſet about it: it is the firſt and moſt neceſſary thing in the deſcription of a covenanter, that he is a church-member.

THIS, however, does not hinder Covenanters from being conſidered in their civil relations, or from coming under particular and formal engagements to the faithful diſcharge of the various duties they owe to God and their neighbour as good citizens. Hence a family, a city, a nation, or ſeveral nations, jointly acknowledging themſelves members of the church of Chriſt, may go about the duty of Covenanting.

THE truth is, church-membership does not deſtroy civil relations, but conſecrates them to the Lord. A perſon may be conſidered as huſband or wife, as maſter or ſervant, as parent or child, both in civil ſociety and in the church, or as the apoſtle expreſſes it, *both in the fleſh and in the Lord*, Phil. 16. Indeed, the church of Chriſt knows no ſuch ſuperiority as is the object of worldly ambition, and has no reſpect of perſons. Church-members, however different their ſituation in life, are all conſidered as in the ſame relation to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; a glorious relation before which all the pre-eminence ariſing from the diſtinctions among the men of the world, diſappears, like the ſtars before the riſing ſun. In the church of Chriſt the duties of the ſervant and the ſubject, are no leſs honourable than thoſe of the maſter and the magiſtrate; becauſe here all the honour lies in conformity to the word of God and a ſingle eye to his glory.

CIVIL relations, then, being known and acknowledged in the church, it follows that in obſerving any of the ordinances that Chriſt hath given to the church, people may be conſidered

as ſtanding in ſuch relations to one another, in thoſe, for example, of a family, of a kingdom, of a commonwealth. So they may be conſidered in the duty of goſpel-humiliation for ſin, Zec. xii. 12. *And the Land ſhall mourn, every family apart.* In the ſame ſocial capacity, they may avow themſelves a part of the kingdom of Chriſt in the moſt open explicit manner by the duty of public Covenanting: which ſeems to be the only adequate ſenſe of Revel. xi. 15. *And the ſeventh angel ſounded; and there were great voices in heaven, ſaying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chriſt.* Not merely the individuals of thoſe kingdoms, but the kingdoms themſelves, or bodies of people conſidered collectively, are here ſaid to be our Lord's.

COVENANTERS *muſt* be conſidered as church-members; but they *may* be conſidered, too, as members of a civil ſociety. If we regard the act merely of vowing and ſwearing to the Lord of hoſts, Covenanters are to be viewed as church-members only; but if we regard the character or denominations at large, of thoſe who ſet about this duty, or if we regard the extent of the obligations it brings upon them, then covenanters may be viewed as members both of the church and of civil ſociety.

Of the Obligations come under in PUBLIC COVENANTING.

SINCE this duty is of a ſpiritual nature the obligations that it brings perſons under, are ſpiritual; and it belongs properly to God

and the church to take notice of men's behaviour with regard to these obligations. The neglect of this duty, and the breach of the engagements come under in it, are crimes in the sight of God and of the church; but they do not fall under the observation of the state. They are crimes indeed, which those to whom Christ has committed the keys of church-government and discipline, are bound to restrain and chastise, by admonitions, by rebukes, or by excommunication: but the corporal punishments of the state cannot properly be applied here; for here the state has no authority. The word of God and prayer are the great weapons that we should diligently make use of to check the opposition to this duty from satan, the world and the flesh.

WE grant, indeed, that the state may not only take notice of, and punish breaches of these obligations, when such breaches are crimes the cognisance of which belongs to the state; but it may go a step farther: if the opposition or contempt with which persons treat covenanting, as it is gone about in the church at any particular time, be an undeniable fact; the state may make use of the fact in any case where it may serve as an evidence of a crime the cognisance of which is the province of the state. For example, if opposition to the duty of Covenanting should happen to be very generally accompanied with disaffection to the civil government; that opposition, being an undeniable fact in the case of any person, might, in that case, be admitted as a presumptive evidence of such disaffection; and in that view, might be taken notice of by the state.

Of the Extent of these OBLIGATIONS.

WE have endeavoured to shew that the people of any nation, having in their collective capacity become a part of the church of Christ, may in the same capacity, observe the duty of Covenanting. We add, that wherever this is done, there will be, of necessity, some degree of representation; unless we could suppose the individuals of a whole nation to have all, at the same time, ability, inclination and opportunity for joining in this exercise; a supposition absurd enough surely.

THERE are other cases in which the church admits of representation. Thus when a minister is called to be the pastor of any particular congregation, it is only a part of the members that give their votes for him: the common order of society requires that part to be the majority: The consequence is, that the candidate is declared to be duly elected; the act of those individuals who gave their voices for him is considered as the act of the whole congregation; and accordingly the whole congregation is under the same obligations to regard him in his ministerial character as those individuals. Let us only suppose a nation to be one large congregation, and the parallel between this case and that of national covenanting appears to be very exact.

WE have a remarkable instance of a covenant which was binding on a whole nation through successive generations, having been entered into by the representatives of that nation,

in the tranſaction with the Gibeonites wherein Joſhua and the princes along with him repreſented Iſrael, Joſh. ix. 15, 18, 21. The Lord himſelf confirmed this league, and puniſhed the Iſraelites for the breach of it upwards of five hundred years afterward, 2 Sam. xxi. 1, 2.*

H

* IT may be aſked, how the contract with the Gibeonites was binding, notwithſtanding the craft they uſed to obtain it, and the Lord's expreſs command to deſtroy the Amorites, and to make no league with them?

WE anſwer, If the Gibeonites, in pretending to come from a far country, meant no injury to the Iſraelites, or if they were willing to make reparation for whatever diſadvantage ſhould ariſe to the Iſraelites from their deceit; it is agreeable to the candour and ſimplicity of pure morals to hold the validity of a contract which was unexceptionable in its matter and its end. It is plain, the Gibeonites, inſtead of doing any injury to the Iſraelites, had an honeſt intention to ſerve them; all they ſought was their life; and their life was to be employed in the ſervice of Iſrael.

IT is probable, too, that Joſhua went into this contract in purſuance of the divine direction in Deut. xx. 10, 11. A direction which is delivered in general terms without limitation, being indeed a part of the moral law which binds us to the exerciſe of humanity even in neceſſary wars. In the iſſue, the Lord left conſiderable remains of theſe nations in the land, to prove the Iſraelites, and to hinder them from forgetting the art of war, Jud. iii. 1, 2. And Solomon (nor does it appear that herein he ought to have acted otherwiſe) did not deſtroy ſuch devoted cities as remained in his days, but laid them under tribute, 1 Kings ix. 21. How then are we to underſtand the awful injunction to deſtroy theſe nations? It reſpects the manner in which the Iſraelites were to treat the cities that ſhould reject the offers of peace: It implies too, that they were, in that caſe, to exerciſe far greater ſeverity toward the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, and the Hivites, than toward other nations: for whatever they might ſpare of the conquered cities which were *very far off from them*, they were to ſave alive nothing that breathed of the cities of theſe five nations: ſee Deut. xx. The utter exciſion in ver. 16. ſeems to be oppoſed to the reſerve of the women, children and ſpoil in ver. 14. This view of the matter is agreeable to the conduct of Joſhua. The forward, unprovoked attacks of the Canaanitiſh nations juſtified and rendered neceſſary every inſtance of ſeverity that Joſhua practiſed againſt them, Joſh. xi. 19, 20. Now his conduct may juſtly be regarded as the beſt explanation of the divine command.

WE will not be ſurprized at the peremptory manner in which this command of deſtroying the Canaanites is expreſſed, when we conſider that it is adapted to their peculiar caſe and

It will perhaps be objected, that this was only in a civil matter; and that from the example of civil superiors representing the people of Israel in this instance, it will hardly follow, that civil

character; for the Lord who knows all things, saw their hearts so much hardened, and so fully set in them to do evil, that no clemency, no offers of peace could have any effect upon them.

With regard to the Lord's prohibition of the children of Israel from making any covenant with these nations, it is to be understood according to the reason of it, which is, That such a covenant would be *a snare to them*. A reason which is sometimes contained in the prohibition itself, Exod. xxiii. 32. *Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their Gods*. Indeed it is not conceivable, that the Israelites could enter into a covenant or form any close connection with an idolatrous people without very great danger of being corrupted both in principle and practice. The Israelites were to settle in the territories of the Amorites; therefore the Israelites could not enter into an alliance with the Amorites, unless the latter consented to be of the Israelitish commonwealth: but how could such gross idolators be good members of a commonwealth the whole constitution of which was subservient to the true religion, and in which open and avowed idolatry was a capital crime?

The league with the Gibeonites, then, does not seem to have been contrary to the spirit and design of the mentioned prohibition: for the Gibeonites declared themselves willing to be subject to the laws of the Israelitish commonwealth, when they said to Joshua and the princes, *We are your servants*. It is true, Joshua and the princes were much in the wrong to go so precipitately into this league, *without asking counsel of the Lord*. Church-members are likely to have but little comfort even in a lawful thing, when they neglect to acknowledge the Lord in it. The whole congregation, whether mistaken as to the nature of the league, or offended because the sense of the people had not been taken in the affair, murmured against Joshua and the princes. The Israelitish chiefs, however, shewed, on this occasion, a noble firmness against the clamours of the populace: they were steady to the right, saying, *We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them: But*, added the princes who without fearing, respected the people, and endeavoured to give them all reasonable satisfaction, *let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water to all the congregation*. Thus the religion of an oath was preserved inviolable by sparing the refugees, while by their subjection to perpetual servitude, their falsehood was punished, and the whole congregation of Israel appeased.

The Lord himself confirmed the obligation of this oath in two remarkable instances. One in the encouragement and success which he gave the Israelites against the five kings of the Amorites, who had conspired the destruction of Gibeon, Josh. x. The other in the famine with which in the time of

superiors may represent their people in a religious covenant; superiors who have no powers lawfully delegated to them, to act for the people in matters of religion, as they have in civil matters.

IT is answered, that with regard to the general nature of an oath, and of the obligations arising from it, there is no imaginable difference between politics and religion. To the members both of church and state an oath *is for confirmation the end of all strife*. While the church and civil society have common imperfections, they must, in many cases, have common remedies. Thus they are both made up of men who may deceive; and therefore the obligation of an oath is necessary in both: they are both made up of men that labour under manifold defects and disorders of body and of mind, besides many inconveniencies and incapacities arising from other circumstances; and therefore representation is

David, he visited Israel for a slaughter Saul had made of the Gibeonites, 2 Sam. xxi. 2.

BUT perhaps it will be said, That other causes of the famine might be assigned than breach of covenant: the Gibeonites might be innocent, religious people; and Saul might slay them from motives of cruelty and revenge.

LET us then, consider the passage in the second book of Samuel; but let us guard against adding our own conjectures to the sacred history. It is observable, in the first place, that this covenant is represented as the deed of Israel. It is not said that Joshua and the princes, but *the children of Israel had sworn unto them*. But how did it come to be the deed of Israel? Because each individual gave his consent to it? Rather because the legal representatives of the People treated with the Gibeonites in the name of the people. In the next place, the conduct of Saul seems to be set in direct opposition to the oath which Israel had taken to the Gibeonites. It might be asked, Since the Gibeonites were a remnant of the Amorites, the people who were utterly to be cut off, whence was the slaughter of them so grievous a crime? We have reason to look for some answer to such an obvious difficulty in the narration of the punishment inflicted on Israel for that crime. Nothing is intimated in the narration concerning Saul's motives, or concerning the religious character of the Gibeonites. But the opposition between the oath which was sworn to the Gibeonites and Saul's slaughter of them will strike every reader. *The children of Israel had sworn to them*, and directly contrary to that oath, *Saul sought to slay them*.

neceſſary in both. Hence the circumſtances of an oath and of repreſentation in this tranſaction, are compatible to any kind of ſociety among the ſons of men.

THOUGH Joſhua and the princes were only civil repreſentatives of the people; yet ſince they might be known and acknowledged by the church as ſuch repreſentatives on account of the duties which in that character they owed to God and to the people; ſince we ſhould conſecrate every civil relation to the Lord, and on proper occaſions as the word directs, make uſe of it in his ſervice; why would it have been wrong for Joſhua and the princes to ſet about a plain indiſpenſible duty of religion, as they made a covenant with the Gibeonites, in the name of the people; ſuppoſing Iſrael had been called to the immediate performance of ſuch a duty?

BUT farther, it is clear that ſuch repreſentation had place in the examples of Covenanting recorded in ſcripture; particularly in the Covenanting that Moſes ſpeaks of in Deut. xxix. 14, 15. *Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that ſtandeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and alſo with him that is not with us this day.* No words could have been more proper than theſe to deſcribe the repreſentation we mean, and to ſhew that, when the Iſraelites as a nation, entered into a covenant with the Lord their God, every Iſraelite was deeply concerned in that covenant, whether he was, or was not preſent at the tranſaction.

THIS repreſentation may be conſidered with reſpect to the preſent generation, and with reſpect to poſterity.

As to the preſent generation of any ſociety, it is repreſented ſufficiently in public Covenanting, if there is evidently a majority agreeing to go about it; if the better part is in that majority;

if there are ſome of all ranks among the covenanters; as in Nehemiah's time, (ix. 38. and x. 28.) the princes, the prieſts, the levites, the porters, the ſingers, the Nethinims ſubſcribed the covenant; in a word, if there is a concurrence of high and low, of rich and poor, that would be deemed ſufficient in other inſtances, to conſtitute a lawful national deed, or ſomething done by the conſent of the nation.

THE preſent generation in any ſociety being ſufficiently repreſented, the repreſentation is extended to poſterity. The individuals, it is true, of which the ſociety is made up, are continually changing; ſo that if it were to be conſidered as the ſame ſociety, only while theſe remained the ſame, it would follow from the births, the deaths, the emigrations, and other accidents which daily occur, that the ſociety would be a tranſient thing, which no contracts would bind for a month, for a week, or ſo much as for one day. But the truth is, while the ſucceſſion of members goes on under the ſame denomination, the ſociety, with regard to contracts, is in the ſame ſtate as an individual; that is, it continues under the obligation of whatever contracts it has entered into, till they be fulfilled, or till ſome circumſtance ariſe equivalent to what would lawfully free an individual from the obligation of his contract.

How agreeable this is to the common ſenſe of mankind will appear, if we conſider that it is never objected to the obligation of any law, or of a treaty with any neighbouring ſtate, that ſuch a law or treaty was made before an individual of the preſent age had a being. A Britiſh magiſtrate would be ridiculous indeed, if he ſhould offer no other apology for ſome glaring violations of the *magna charta*, which is deemed the great bulwark of Engliſh liberty, than this, That there

has not been a perſon alive for many hundred years paſt who was preſent at the making of that charter.

FARTHER ſtill with reſpect to the obligations of public covenanting, it will be uſeful to conſider not only on whom they are laid; but the matter alſo, and the ends of them.

IF the matter of theſe obligations were ſomething in itſelf indifferent, then the continuance of them would be according to the end of them. This may be illuſtrated by the caſe of the Rechabites in Jerem. xxxv. 1—11. The things that Jonadab commanded his children (to dwell in tents and to abſtain from wine) were in themſelves indifferent; but the temperance and humility which Jonadab's injunction was intended to promote, were ſo ſuitable to the ſituation of the Rechabites, that its obligation continued, in all probability, while they ſojourned as ſtrangers among the Iſraelites. Suppoſing with moſt of the Commentators, that this Jonadab was the ſame whom Jehu invited, in the vanity of his heart, to come and ſee his zeal for the Lord, the Rechabites at the time when Jeremiah offered them wine, had kept their father's command nearly three hundred years. It is obſervable, that this whole affair was of a purely civil nature‡, and cannot be ſuppoſed to have reference to any religious

‡ THESE obſervances of the Rhecabites are not to be conſidered as belonging to religious worſhip; becauſe in the worſhip of God nothing is acceptable to him but what he himſelf hath appointed: in that matter, we are to call no man father. Nor can we think that Jonadab's command proceeded from caprice, or was without ſome weighty reaſon; for to impoſe needleſs rules about matters of indifference is only to lay a ſnare for the conſcience. It is, therefore, likely, Jonadab was led to lay down theſe regulations for the conduct of his children, from a prudent regard to their ſituation, and for ſuch ends as the following: That they might not be tempted to quit the paſtoral kind of life which the Kenites of whom they were deſcended, uſed to lead, 1 Chron. ii. 55. Jud. i. 16. That they might avoid the envy of the Iſraelites among whom

peculiarity of the old Teſtament; ſo that it cannot reaſonably be denied that the like inſtances may have place under the new Teſtament, or that we, like the Rechabites, may lie under obligations from the commands and covenants of our forefathers.

BUT ſince the matter of the obligations of which we treat, belongs to the moral law, they will be perpetual; that is, they will continue to bind the individual till death, and the ſociety till its diſſolution. The reaſon is plain. The obligations of our vows are always from the moral law. They are ſo, even when reſtrained to certain times and circumſtances; a reſtraint or limitation which ariſes wholly from the indifferent nature of thoſe things to which perſons or ſocieties bind themſelves. But when theſe are ſuch things as the moral law requires, there is evidently no ſuch reſtraint or limitation. An example may be given. Suppoſe a perſon makes a vow that he will drink no wine for the ſpace of ten months; whence, in that caſe, is the binding force of his vow? It is from the moral law which forbids us to break our vows. And whence is the continuance of it limited? From the indifferent nature of the thing about which the vow is made; as one may either drink or not drink wine, he may refrain from it either for a ſhorter or longer ſpace of time, without any breach of the moral law. But ſuppoſe one makes a vow to love Chriſt and his people: in that caſe, there will be no ſuch reſtraint or li-

they were ſtrangers; for Jethro their great anceſtor who, at the invitation of Moſes his ſon in law, Num. x. 29. had joined himſelf to Iſrael in the wilderneſs, was originally of Midian: That, guarding againſt an over-attachment to the country of Iſrael, they might be ready to go wherever Providence ſhould call them: In fine, that they might be preſerved from the enticements of luxury which unfit men for bearing the hardſhips of their lot. See a Diſſertation of Witſius on this ſubject.

mitation, the matter of the vow as well as the binding force of it being derived wholly from the moral law.

It is true, the obligations that ſocieties now enter into, will ceaſe with the ſocieties themſelves: ſo that there will be no ſuch obligations in a future ſtate. In the heavenly kingdom, Covenant-obligations, like the command of keeping holy to God one day in ſeven, honouring our civil ſuperiors, and ſome other duties of the moral law, will then be loſt in the ſuper-abounding diſplays of the divine glory in the face of Jeſus Chriſt.

"But it is very hard," cries Leviculus, "that we ſhould be bound by any covenant, to "a ſet of religious opinions before we examine "them." Are there any truths, Leviculus, which God requires us to believe? "I hope "you are not ſo uncharitable as to take me for "an infidel: I believe the truths of the bible "like other Chriſtians." And are you under an obligation to believe theſe truths? "Yes, "in regard they are the word of God; but—" I beg you to inform me of one or two things more. Does that obligation remain the ſame, whether you be at the pains to enquire into thoſe truths, or not? "Yes." May perſons of ordinary capacity, through the Lord's bleſſing on their diligent uſe of the appointed means, attain ſuch a certain knowledge of thoſe truths, as to be able to ſpecify them? "Undoubtedly; for "otherwiſe theſe truths could not properly be "ſaid to be revealed to mankind at all; and "ſurely He whoſe yoke is eaſy, will not com-"mand any thing without affording ſtrength for "the performance of it: But the right of pri-"vate judgment—" Stop a moment, Leviculus; conſider what you have granted: you are, it ſeems, under an obligation, independent of

all your own inquiry, to believe certain truths which may be ſpecified. Pray ſuppoſe now, theſe truths are actually ſpecified, and laid before you by your parents or others. "What "then?" Why, then you would have a ſet of truths preſented to your view, which you acknowledge yourſelf bound to believe, whether you take the pains to enquire into them, or not. Suppoſe, again, you ſhould be laid under covenant-obligations to the ſame ſet of truths ‡, would theſe, any more than your former obligation, be a bar to impartial inquiry. "Chriſtians differ "ſo often and ſo widely among themſelves as to "what ought or ought not to paſs for truths de- "livered in the ſcriptures, that one cannot help "thinking it muſt be a work of the greateſt dif- "ficulty to aſcertain thoſe truths: hence if I am "laid under the obligations of a covenant ſpeci- "fying a number of things as divine truths, I "may, in reality, be only tyed down to ſo many "errors." It is an ungrounded apprehenſion, Leviculus; for it is plain, that covenant-obli-

‡ THOUGH no addition can be made to the obligation of the divine law, there may be obligations of another and ſubordinate kind; ſuch are thoſe of gratitude, of dutiful ſubjection to our lawful ſuperiors, and thoſe in queſtion, of our oaths and covenants. It is true, theſe obligations ariſe out of the obligation of the divine law, and are included in it: for example, the obligations of gratitude belong to the rule of doing to others as we would have them do to us; the obligation of obeying our lawful ſuperiors belongs to the fifth commandment; that of acting conſiſtently with our profeſſions, to the ninth; and that of our oath or covenant, to the third. Thus if one is under all theſe obligations to pray for his neighbours, and to ſeek their good; the ſin of neglecting to do ſo will be agravated by the additional breach of the fifth, ninth and third commandments. Hence the falſehood of this propoſition, That an oath does not lay us under a new obligation to any thing which the law of God previouſly requires of us. The law of God binds us to declare the truth when we have a call in providence; but no one will ſay, it is, therefore, needleſs for a court of judicature to ſwear witneſſes. The direct contrary to the above mentioned propoſition, is the truth; which is, That in every caſe wherein we are under a primary obligation from God's law, we may, as occaſions require, come under the ſubordinate obligation of an oath.

gations to any thing as a divine truth, can have no place, unleſs there is a previous obligation to it from the word of God. The former never can be larger in their comprehenſion than the latter. With regard to the difficulty you mention, we have ourſelves alone to blame for it: It is not any obſcurity or ambiguity in the bible; but our own pride, paſſion, prejudice, heart-enmity, and our neglecting to look to the Lord the Spirit without whoſe illumination we cannot reap the leaſt ſaving advantage by ſearching the ſcriptures; theſe are the things which render us unable to determine what particular truths the Lord is, at any time, calling us to profeſs, or what duties to practiſe; theſe are the things from which have ſprung all the animoſities and diviſions of the religious world. It is, however, our unfailing comfort, that ſo great is the ſalvation which Chriſt hath procured for his people, and ſo effectual the aids of the Holy Spirit who dictated the word, and who remains in the Church unto the end of the world, that the Church, endeavouring ſingly to keep the Lord's way, may warrantably ſeek, and confidently hope to obtain the moſt certain and determinate knowledge of whatever truths and duties Providence calls her, in a particular manner, to hold faſt and maintain; and truths and duties, thus known, are of all things the fitteſt to become the matter of an oath, the obligation of which extends to poſterity. "But is there, indeed, "no reaſon to apprehend, that theſe obligations "may hinder people from ſeeking thoſe religi- "ous principles in the bible which are ſpecified "in their covenant?" No more, Leviculus, will theſe obligations hinder people from attending to the word, than a profeſſion of adherence to the faith and worſhip of any particular church, with which we communicate; no more (however man's corrupted nature may abuſe theſe ob-

ligations as it does every thing) than a moſt ready reception of the apoſtles' word hindered the Bereans from *ſearching the ſcriptures daily whether theſe things were ſo*, Acts xvii. 11.; no more, in fine, than one's engagement to do any thing exactly according to a certain rule, will make him utterly neglect that rule: for indeed it is the very firſt obligation that our covenanting lays us under, *to ſearch the ſcriptures*; and our regard to the other obligations will be only in proportion to the regard which we have to this. The truth is, without a diligent and impartial inquiry after the divine warrant in the ſcripture of the truths and duties that are ſpecified in our covenanting, we can have no due eſteem of ſuch truths and duties; we cannot ſee the propriety of our engagement to them; nor will we cleave to them ſo ſtedfaſtly and reſolutely, as is neceſſary for proſecuting the ends of Covenanting.

BEFORE we quit this part of our ſubject, it is neceſſary to obſerve, that the awful threatnings of the ſcripture againſt covenant-breaking ſhew us how ſacred theſe obligations are in God's account. Such are theſe threatnings: Lev. xxvi. 25. *I will bring a ſword upon you, that ſhall avenge the quarrel of my covenant.* Hoſ. viii. 1. *Set the trumpet to thy mouth: he ſhall come as an eagle againſt the houſe of the Lord, becauſe they have tranſgreſſed my covenant, and treſpaſſed againſt my law.* Covenant-breaking was the ruin of Iſrael, 2 Kings xviii. 12. and of Judah, Jerem. xxxiv. 18, 19, 20. If God reſented ſo dreadfully the violation of an oath which the king of Judah had taken to Nebuchadnezzar, though it was extorted from him by force, Ezek. xvii. 12——21. how much more will he reſent the violation of an oath taken to himſelf? It is chiefly on account of the perfidy of the Iſraelites that they are ſo often charged with ſpiritual a-

dultery, as in Jerem. iii. Ezek. xvi. and xxiii. When we put these examples from ourselves, as if they had no reference to any thing besides the breach of Israel's covenant; we are the dupes of that common artifice of the deceitful heart, to shift the reproofs and calls of the word, on pretence that they are not directed to us.

O ye Churches and nations, that have entered into covenant with the Lord, know for certain, that it will be your security, your honour, your happiness to keep the sacred obligation. You have infinitely more to fear from a breach of your faith with heaven, than from the bold attempts of the most formidable enemy on earth. But have you already forgotten the Lord's covenant? or do you remember only to turn it into ridicule? You have then almost filled the measure of your iniquity; and the time is near for the Lord to make some striking manifestation of himself, as *the God who keepeth covenant for ever.* Hear, while he graciously calls you back to himself; *Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.* But if you harden your necks against reproof, he says to you, *Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.*

Of the Peculiar Ends *of this duty.*

We have already seen that the proper end of Public covenanting, as being a religious duty, is our spiritual profit, or the good of our souls. We may now inquire, what sort of spiritual profit our Public Covenanting tends to promote, or what are the ends which, in some measure, distinguish it from the other duties of religion.

Public Covenanting seems to have the two

following things for the more peculiar, the more direct and immediate ends of it.

THE first is, *That we may appear, in the most avowed and determinate manner, as the Lord's people; with respect to those particular points of truth and duty, to which especially, the Lord (by permitting at any time, men's violent opposition, or by other providential circumstances) calls us to adhere.* If the exigencies of the prince require a vigorous assistance, if his life, his crown, or his honour is in any hazard, how proper and necessary is it for his subjects, to give him the most public assurances of their loyalty and affection to him, and of their disposition to serve him? In like manner, the Covenanting of which we treat, is a most solemn testimony, that our resolution of cleaving to the Lord in such a particular truth or duty, is fixed, and free from allowed hesitation. Thus the covenanters in Jehoiada's time declared themselves the Lord's people as adhering to his pure worship in opposition to the worship of Baal. Thus too, the Macedonians *gave their own selves to the Lord*, testifying in that solemn manner, their willingness to supply the necessities of the poor saints, the duty to which they were then especially called. Church-members, in their covenanted adherence to particular truths and duties, stand conspicuous *with the Lamb on mount Sion, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.*

THE other peculiar end of this ordinance is, *To beget and increase mutual confidence among the followers of Christ, with respect to the contributing of their endeavours toward the maintenance of any particular truth or duty.* Each individual of an army acts with greater chearfulness against an enemy, when he is assured by the military oath that his fellow-soldiers are voluntarily engaged in the same cause. So it is a great encouragement to an honest heart in contending

againſt particular evils and particular enemies of our Lord's kingdom, to ſee fellow-profeſſors binding themſelves, by oath, to oppoſe the ſame evils and enemies.

It is not meant, that theſe ends are not promoted by the ſocial obſervance of other duties; for they are undoubtedly ſome of the principal ends of our public attendance on the word, ſacraments and prayer. Nor is it meant, that theſe are the only ends of Covenanting: in common with other ordinances, it tends to the edification of the church, by confirming and eſtabliſhing perſons in the way of duty; by increaſing their faith, love, repentance and new obedience; by glorifying the Lord before the world. But Covenanting has a peculiar fitneſs to aſcertain our preſent adherence to any particular point of truth or duty, to increaſe the unanimity of the Lord's people, and their confidence in one another, with reſpect to the reſolution of ſtriving together for that point of truth or duty. So the peculiar ends of the Lord's Supper (whatever other ends, generally ſpeaking, it may anſwer) are theſe two; to ſhew the Lord's death till he come, and to confirm our faith in a crucified Chriſt as the nouriſhment of our ſouls.

These two ends of Public Covenanting are directly oppoſite to the two great points which the devil is chiefly intent upon in order to ſupport his kingdom among profeſſed Chriſtians. One of which points is this: When he cannot bring perſons to be open enemies to the cauſe and kingdom of the Lord Chriſt, to keep them in ignorance as to what the apoſtle Peter calls *the preſent truth*; or, at leaſt, to hold them ſo wavering and irreſolute with regard to it, that it may remain doubtful to others, and even to themſelves, whether, in that reſpect, they are, or are not on Chriſt's ſide. Nothing is a greater eye-ſore to ſatan than an ordinance, which

tends to put that matter out of queſtion, and which, by directing our aims to ſome particular part, will, through God's bleſſing, make us act, with greater ſteadineſs and with greater effect, againſt the whole of Satan's kingdom.

THE other great point that Satan labours is to ſow diſcord among brethren. Brethren *dwelling together in unity*, delightful as the ointment of perfume uſed under the law in the conſecration of the prieſthood, refreſhing and cauſing ſpiritual fruitfulneſs, like the deſcending dews, is a kind of heaven upon earth, and excites, in a peculiar manner, the reſentment of hell. When the Lord gives his people *one heart and one way* according to his promiſe; when they can ſimply confide in one another; in ſhort, when they have much of a ſpirit of Public Covenanting, which is, in other words, a ſpirit of unanimity; then their oppoſition to Satan's kingdom is moſt effectual.

SUCH being the peculiar ends of Public Covenanting, why ſhould we wonder that the malice of ſatan and his inſtruments operates, with remarkable keenneſs, againſt this ordinance?

Of the OCCASION *of Public Covenanting.*

THIS is no ſtated duty, like the obſervation of the ſabbath, or like morning and evening worſhip in the cloſet or the family: it is an occaſional duty, like faſting. Hence it is neceſſary to inquire, at what time, or on what occaſions we ought, in this manner, to give our own ſelves to the Lord.

THE proper time for the practice of an occaſional duty is this: When Providential circum-

ſtances, to which the ſcriptural grounds and reaſons of the duty are applicable, open the way for the performance of it. Thus if the Lord beſtows a remarkable mercy upon any perſon or people, the way is then opened for the exerciſe of occaſional thanksgiving upon the ſcriptural ground of it, that is, our obligation to give ſuitable evidences of our gratitude for the Lord's kindneſs.

The Providential circumſtances which give occaſion to the performance of ſuch duties, admit of an endleſs variety: but the grounds and reaſons of them are fixed and determined by the word of God. Hence it is that widely different circumſtances may warantably occaſion the performance of the ſame duty: the abuſe of proſperity, and the ravages of war or of the plague, may, with equal reaſon, be the occaſions of national or family faſting. Hence, too, it is not neceſſary to warrant us in imitating a ſcriptural example of an occaſional duty, that our providential circumſtances ſhould be preciſely the ſame as thoſe mentioned in the example: it is enough, if it appears from our Providential circumſtances, that we have the ſame grounds and reaſons for performing the duty, which they had whoſe performance of it is in ſcripture recorded with approbation.

Every one will allow the truth of theſe obſervations as applied to public faſting; and why ſhould we not allow the truth of them as applied to public Covenanting? Are not faſting and Covenanting very nearly connected? Do not engagements to be the Lord's, and to obey his commands, engagements either more or leſs explicit, follow neceſſarily upon ſincere confeſſion of, and godly ſorrow for ſin? If the latter proceeds upon evangelical principles, ſo will the former. We may as well enter into our engagements jointly and publicly, as make our

confeſſion in that manner. If our acknowledgment *that we have done iniquity*, is open and explicit, our engagement, *that we will do iniquity no more*, ought to be equally ſo. Now, we never imagine, that it is unwarrantable to imitate a Scriptural example of public faſting, when we have manifold grounds for it, on this account merely, that we are not preciſely in the ſame outward circumſtances as thoſe mentioned in ſuch a part of the ſacred hiſtory. In this caſe, it is always allowed, that when Providential circumſtances, however different in themſelves, ſuggeſt the ſame reaſons for faſting, the call to that exerciſe, is the ſame.

Suppose it ſhould be enquired, whether we ought, at preſent, to imitate the example of Public faſting in Ezra ix.? In order to determine the queſtion, not only would we have to conſider, whether, like the people of Iſrael, the prieſts and Levites at that time, we are guilof connecting ourſelves by marriage with the profane part of the world? It would be neceſſry to examine farther, whether we have cauſe to acknowledge with Ezra, *That our iniquities are increaſed over our heads, and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heavens?* This would ſurely be enough to warrant our imitation of Ezra's faſt, even ſuppoſing we could not find any thing in our caſe, like the circumſtance of the Iſraelites intermarrying with the heathens around them.

In like manner, if we would know, whether, in our preſent circumſtances, we ought to imitate the example of public Covenanting recorded in the book of Nehemiah; the queſtion would not be, whether, like the Jews at that time, we are juſt come out of a ſtate of captivity, and are ſtill under the dominion of an heathen prince? But the point neceſſary to be known, would be this: whether our circum-

ſtances furniſh us with the ſame reaſons for covenanting which the circumſtances of the Jews then furniſhed them with? whether our ſins, the tokens of God's diſpleaſure on account of them, our hazard, in any inſtance, of backſliding from the way of the Lord; whether theſe and other things plead as much for public Covenanting in our caſe, as they pleaded for it in the caſe of the church in the days of Nehemiah?

FARTHER, if we never deem ourſelves to have an opportunity of imitating a ſcriptural example of any religious duty, till our circumſtances in Providence, coincide with all the circumſtances in that example, we may live to the age of Methuſaleh, without ever having ſuch an opportunity. Nay, there is one circumſtance that, under the Moſaic œconomy, attended the public obſervance of occaſional duties, which is never to occur again: the circumſtance was, that one viſible immediate communion in the ordinances of God's worſhip, appeared then to comprehend the whole church of Chriſt upon earth. But how abſurd is it to ſuppoſe that we are enjoined to imitate examples, which we never can have an opportunity of imitating! or that our obedience to one of the plaineſt precepts of the word, ſuch as this, *Vow and pay unto the Lord your God*, ſhould be confined to ſuch imitation! To avoid the abſurdity, it ſeems neceſſary to admit the following obſervation: That Providential circumſtances are connected with the practice of public Covenanting, or of any other occaſional duty, in theſe reſpects only; as opening the way for it, as ſuggeſting motives to it, or as making the ends of it neceſſary for the help of church-members in the path of duty.

ON the other hand, it is abſurd and ſuperſtitious to regard Providential circumſtances as, of themſelves and for their own ſakes, warranting

the performance of any duty. Such a capricious connection between the events of Scripture-history and certain religious duties, gave rise to Christmass, to Lent, to Easter, and to many other uninstituted observances by which professed Christians have deviated from the simplicity of New Testament worship. They gratified their taste for novelties in religion by annexing, as in the instances now mentioned, certain duties to certain times, places and other circumstances: at first, they took both the circumstances and the duties out of the Bible; only the connection was appointed by themselves: afterward, they proceeded farther; they added new duties and new circumstances of their own invention. Thus superstition was carried by degrees to that enormous height at which we find it in the church of Rome. But we do not mean to dwell on this remark, though it is no great digression from the subject of our present inquiry.

IT may be farther observed, that neither the precepts nor the promises of the word concerning public Covenanting, mention any particular set of providential circumstances as marking the season of this duty, Psal. lxxvi. 11. *Vow and pay unto the Lord your God.* Rom. xii. 1. *I beseech you by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.* Isai. xix. 18. *In that day, shall five cities in the land of Egypt, speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts.* verse 21. *They shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it.*

WITH regard to the last of these passages, it is observable that the season of Covenanting is pointed out by the expression *in that day*; by which (as will easily appear from the consideration of the whole passage, in which *altars*, *sacrifices* and *oblations to the Lord*, which under the

Mosaic dispensation, were allowed to be at Jerusalem only, are foretold to be in Egypt) is undoubtedly meant the day of the New Testament-dispensation, intimating that the frequency and the evangelical manner of public Covenanting, were, among other things, to be the distinguishing glory of the New Testament-dispensation.

AGAIN, in the following comfortable promise, the exercise of Covenanting is connected, not with any outward circumstances which fall under the observation of the carnal eye, but with a rich effusion of the Holy Ghost, whom the world neither sees nor knows, Isai. xliv. 3, 5. *I will pour waters upon the thirsty; and floods upon the dry ground.* And then *One shall say, I am the Lord's; and he* (for so we may read the words) *shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and he shall subscribe with the hand, and surname himself by the name of Israel.* Thus the general concurrence of church-members in the duty of Gospel-humiliation, is connected with the gift of the Spirit in that remarkable promise, Zech. xii. 10. *I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.* We should learn from these promises, (which, blessed be God! have often been remarkably verified in the experience of his people) to set forward in the duties of Gospel-humiliation and Covenanting in the faith of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon us: for it is the Lord's usual manner of dealing with his people agreeably to the order of the new Covenant, to give the Holy Spirit in his remarkably strengthening, enlightening and comforting influences, neither while they carelessly neglect their duty; nor yet, in any respect or in any degree, (as the legal pride of the heart will suggest) on

account of the performance of their duty; but rather while they are honeſtly endeavouring to go forward in it. Hence the prophet Iſaiah ſays, *Thou meeteſt him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteouſneſs, thoſe that remember thee in thy ways.* Hence, too, the Holy Ghoſt is ſaid to be given *to them that aſk him*, Luke xi. 13. and *to them that obey him*, Acts v. 32. Thus the Lord honours his own inſtitutions and his own way; not indeed, for our ſakes, but for his own name's ſake.

PERHAPS it will be ſaid, if it be our duty to eſſay covenanting, whenever our Providential circumſtances afford motives and incitements to it, why was it ſo ſeldom practiſed by the Iſraelites? One ſhould think, the prevalence of iniquity, the danger of ſeduction from the path of duty, and alarming evidences of the Lord's diſpleaſure (had theſe been deemed ſufficient reaſons for Covenanting) would have led the church of Iſrael to covenant in the days of the Judges as well as in the days of Joſhua; in the reign of Jehoſhaphat as well as in that of Aſa.

IN anſwer to this it may, in the firſt place, be obſerved, that we cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe that all the inſtances of the Covenanting of the Jewiſh church, are expreſly mentioned in the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament; a hiſtory which is very ſuccinct; recording rather the revolutions of the church than the ſeries of her tranſactions. There is, however, hardly any other occaſional duty of which we have more frequent examples, than of Covenanting. One may produce out of the Old Teſtament as many examples of public Covenanting as of public occaſional Faſting or Thankſgiving. We have no account of any public Covenanting in David's time; and yet we cannot prove that there was none, or that he does not refer to it when he ſays, *I*

have ſworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

When the examples of any duty in Scripture are obviouſly ſufficient for our direction with regard to the grounds, the reaſons, and the manner of performing that duty, it is but a poor excuſe for the neglect of it, that it is not exemplified ſo often or in ſuch places of the bible as we think proper.

But farther in anſwer to the objection, we grant, that in times of prevailing corruption and apoſtacy from the Lord; nay, even when the church of Iſrael was conſiderably reformed, this and other particular duties might be greatly neglected: as we know, Jehoſhaphat, Hezekiah, and other good kings, though they did much toward the reformation of Iſrael, ſuffered the high places to remain untouched. When the Lord reproves his profeſſing people for their obſtinacy in departing from him, the reproof implies their neglect of this duty; becauſe their public Covenanting was no other than an explicit avowal of their reſolution to return to the Lord; a reſolution which could hardly be deemed upright and ſincere, while they refuſed to make ſuch an open avowal of it.

If it be aſked, why the neglect of Covenanting is never expreſly mentioned among the other ſins of the Iſraelites? We anſwer, That as Covenanting was not ſo much one particular duty, as the proper appointed means of returning to the Lord in the obſervance of all the duties incumbent on them; ſo the neglect of Covenanting was not ſo much one particular ſin as an obſtinate perſiſting to depart from the Lord in all their ſins. Hence we may very well underſtand the neglect of Covenanting to be meant by ſuch general expreſſions as theſe; *forſaking the Lord, rebelling againſt him, refuſing to hearken to his voice.*

IF it ſhould be ſaid, that Covenanting may be proper, when the body of the nation is willing, as the body of Iſrael were, to concur in it: but how are a few perſons of a Chriſtian country, warranted to diſtinguiſh themſelves from their fellow-chriſtians by public Covenanting? The anſwer is obvious from the foregoing obſervations. The reaſons for the duty of Covenanting, as they may be gathered from the diſpenſations of Providence compared with the directions of the word, may not only warrant, but urge us to eſſay the performance of the duty, however great the multitudes that deſpiſe it. Theſe reaſons are our warrant and our call to it; and not merely the coincidence between our circumſtances and thoſe of the examples in Scripture.

IN the abovementioned paſſage of Iſai. xix. it is foretold, That *five cities of the land of Egypt* ſhall not be aſhamed of the ſingularity of *ſwearing to the Lord of hoſts*. In antient Egypt there were, according to Herodotus, no leſs than twenty thouſand cities. Undoubtedly five cities were but a ſmall part of ſo large and flouriſhing a kingdom. It is plain, that the few who feel their obligation from God's authority to the practice of this duty, are by no means to forbear it, becauſe the many refuſe to concur in it. We are as little to follow a multitude in omitting to do good as in doing evil.

THOSE who join in Public Covenanting ſhould, no doubt, be unanimous among themſelves, like the Jewiſh Covenanters in Nehem. x. in ſhewing a ſuitable zeal for reformation, ſuch unanimity being no more than the import of their covenanting. But ſuppoſing many others to be againſt the principal ends of it, thoſe who ſincerely ſeek the advancement of theſe ends ought, by no means, to omit it on that account.

BUT what if thoſe who refuſe to join with us in public Covenanting, are, in other reſpects,

more faithful and active in reformation than ourſelves? Why then, in theſe reſpects, let us prefer them to ourſelves; let us love and eſteem them; let us encourage them; let us imitate them. But allowing them to be equal to the apoſtle Paul in the labours of love and zeal for the cauſe of Chriſt, it is at our utmoſt peril, if we follow them in matters of religion, any farther than they follow Chriſt. In theſe matters it ſhould be our ſingle aim to have the approbation of Chriſt: but it cannot be ſhewn, that He will admit our great reſpect for the piety and the different opinions of eminent men, as a ſufficient excuſe for our omiſſion of a duty which his word calls us to obſerve, as in other reſpects ſuitable to our Providential circumſtances: and it behoves us to have our reaſons for omitting, as well as our reaſons for practiſing an occaſional duty from no leſs authority than that of *the law and the teſtimony*: in both we have much need to *ceaſe from our own wiſdom*.

A PERSON who, in ſingleneſs of heart, is *ſeeking of the Lord a right way*, may find very ſcriptural motives and incitements to this duty in thoſe very conſiderations by which many would excuſe themſelves from taking any trouble about it. Such a one will ſay: "This duty "is oppoſed by the civil magiſtrate, by the "greater part of the nation, and even by ſome of "thoſe who, I hope, are, in the main, fearers "of the Lord. But this, I am well perſuaded, "is an ordinance of the Lord Chriſt; and the "more numerous and the more reſpectable they "are who oppoſe it, I deſire, through grace, to "be the more ſtedfaſt in cleaving to it, and the "more ready to embrace any opportunity of put-"ting it in practice. I ought to rejoice at ſuch "an occaſion of teſtifying my love to the Lord "Jeſus, and of ſhewing, that my regard to the "honour of his name, which is ſo deeply con-

"cerned in each of his inſtitutions, prevails over "every inferior conſideration."

BUT farther, it may be objected, that if two parties, equally active in reformation, and equally tenacious of their reſpective peculiar tenets, ſhould both ſet about public Covenanting, each party would take its own tenets into its covenant, and conſequently the covenant of the one party would be contradictory to that of the other: thus by their covenanting, inſtead of helping, they would hinder the endeavours of one another toward reformation.

WE anſwer, if neither the peculiar tenets of the one party, nor thoſe of the other, are truths of God's word, then they ſhould not be inſiſted on as matters of great importance: an oſtentatious profeſſion of them is a grievous ſin, diſhonouring God, and hindering the peace of the church. But thoſe of both parties who deſire to drop ſuch *matters of doubtful diſputation*, ought not, for the bigotry of the reſt, to be hindered from *joining themſelves to the Lord*, and to one another, in ſocial covenanting.

BUT ſo far as the diſtinguiſhing principles of of either party are truths of God's word, they are to be held faſt; and let the reputation of ſuch as oppoſe them be, otherwiſe, ever ſo great or ever ſo unqueſtionable; yet in reſpect of their oppoſition to theſe truths, and ſo far as they carry it, they ſhew themſelves to be real enemies of reformation *; ſpecious perhaps, but

* WE are not to give up an important truth, becauſe thoſe who deny it, are engaged in the ſame cauſe with us in reſpect of many other important truths. Independents join with us in teſtifying againſt the impoſition of ceremonies in the church of England; the church of England, in teſtifying againſt the Papiſts; and the Papiſts themſelves, in teſtifying againſt Deiſts and Arians. Indeed, we have rather a nearer connexion with the firſt than with the ſecond, and a connexion incomparably nearer with the ſecond than with the third, according

ſo much the more enſnaring. Church-members may engage by ſolemn covenant, to contend for any particular truth of God's word, with ſo much the more propriety, that it is called *one of their peculiar tenets*, that is, a tenet which is almoſt univerſally neglected and oppoſed; becauſe it is more eſpecially when that is the caſe with any divine truth, that we are called on to avow and to promote our joint adherence to it by our public Covenanting.

ALL that we do or can engage to in Covenanting is an adherence to the truths and duties of God's word. Hence the covenanting of one ſociety of profeſſing Chriſtians, ſo far as it is right or attended with any real obligation, muſt be perfectly agreeable to the covenanting of other ſocieties.

IN matters of fact, an honeſt man will not deliberately aſſert any thing but what he could ſwear to, if ſuch confirmation were neceſſary: much leſs ſhould we profeſs any thing as a part of the true religion, unleſs we receive it ſo heartily and ſincerely as a truth or duty of God's word, that, on a proper call, we could without heſitation, confirm that profeſſion by the ſolemnity of an oath.

CONTRADICTORY profeſſions defeat their own ends no leſs than contradictory covenants defeat theirs. Indeed, there do not ſeem to be any conſequences of the latter which do not, in ſome degree, attend the former: a truth which is obvious enough, when one conſiders that public Covenanting is only a very ſolemn and explicit manner of declaring our Chriſtian profeſſion.

to the meaſure of truth which they hold in common with us. But whatever is the degree of our connexion with them, we are not, on that account, to drop our teſtimony againſt Independency, Epiſcopacy or Popery.

ALL we contend for on this head, may be ſummed up in theſe three particulars.

FIRST, It ſeems plain from the preceding obſervations, that whenever the proper grounds and reaſons of Covenanting are applicable to our circumſtances in Providence, we have, then, a ſufficient call to the practice of this duty.

SECONDLY, Though we can hardly ſuppoſe the church, while on earth, to be any conſiderable time without ſome call to this duty ‡; yet there are particular ſeaſons in which, from Providential circumſtances, the call appears to be more urgent than at other times; for it muſt be ſtill more urgent, as our ſins, our temptations, and the ſigns of the Lord's diſpleaſure with us, increaſe and grow more alarming.

THIRDLY, As we are never to be deterred from any thing which we clearly perceive to be our duty by the fear of what may follow upon it, ſo with regard to the conſequences of ſuch a reſolute adherence to the path of duty, it ſhould be our only care to make the word of God in oppoſition to the dictates of carnal ſenſe and reaſon, the ground and meaſure of our expectations. Carnal ſenſe and reaſon are continually ſuggeſting, that a ſtrict and explicit cleaving to the

‡ HENCE it is that ſeveral of the circumſtances which have been ſpecified as marking the ſeaſon of public Covenanting, are circumſtances inſeparable from the earthly condition of the church of Chriſt. Such are the two following: *Firſt*, Returning to the Lord after much backſliding from him; but ſurely that is the church's exerciſe in her beſt times; and her duty in the worſt: *Secondly*, Being in manifeſt danger from enemies; but when was the true church, or when will ſhe be without ſuch danger? Never till ſhe have no more occaſion to watch or to fight. The truth is, it will be hard to imagine a ſituation of the church militant in which ſocial covenanting would be altogether unwarrantable; and yet there are undoubtedly times in which the church diſcerns the Lord's call to this duty more clearly and with leſs diſagreement among her members than at other times.

truths of God will ruin the peace of the church. On the contrary, faith holds it the only way to to preserve the church's unity; becauſe it is the truth dwelling in the ſaints that makes them *love one another with a pure heart fervently*. See to this purpoſe the firſt two verſes of the ſecond epiſtle of John. Hence the more fully, conſtantly, powerfully, and evidently the truth dwells in church-members, ſo much the more will they love one another. Hence it is that the manifeſtation of the truth dwelling in believers by their profeſſion and their practice, are the great means of encouraging and ſtrengthening one another in the Chriſtian courſe; their practice and profeſſion ought, on that account, to be ſingle and explicit; the ambiguity or doubtfulneſs of either in any caſe, being a hindrance to edification. Let the ends we propoſe in covenanting and our proſpect of attaining them be according to this principle; and we will not be apt to let ſlip an opportunity, when Providence affords it, of joining with our fellow church-members in ſo profitable an exerciſe.

Of the HISTORY *of Public Covenanting.*

BY the hiſtory of Covenanting we do not mean only a ſeries of inſtances wherein the members of particular churches formally lifted up their hands and ſwore allegiance to the Lord Chriſt. We conſider it as vaſtly more comprehenſive. It includes, in the firſt place, all the inſtances of church-members declaring, as Providence offered occaſions, their adherence to ſome particular truths and duties of religion. When they were not aſhamed in the preſence of their enemies to avow the relation they ſtood in to the Lord as their God, and their fixed reſolu-

tion to ſerve him; when they acknowledged their own ſins, and engaged particularly to the contrary duties; or when, upon ſome particular evidences of the Lord's diſpleaſure with them, they entered into a mutual agreement to return to the Lord; in all theſe caſes, we conſider church-members as real covenanters.

IN the next place, It includes every inſtance of church-members explicitly declaring their adherence to particular revelations of the covenant of grace, or to any particular truth or duty contained in thoſe revelations. We conſider every explicit profeſſion of faith in the promiſes of that covenant, whether theſe promiſes were firſt made known to Adam and Eve, to Noah, or the prophets, as really and to all intents the very covenanting for which we plead: and in the ſame light we may regard the reſolutions they expreſſed, of obeying the particular divine commands which accompanied thoſe promiſes.

IN fine, the hiſtory of Public Covenanting ſhews us how the church's profeſſion of confidence in the Lord and of obedience to him, came, by degrees, to be more expreſs and formal. As in dictating the holy ſcriptures, God made uſe of the language of men; and in the different ages in which the ſeveral parts of the ſcriptures were given to the church, he ſtill made uſe of that language which was moſt generally underſtood in the places where the church then ſubſiſted: hence the Old Teſtament was written in Hebrew, and the New in Greek. In like manner, the forms which the Lord directed his people to uſe in Covenanting, were ſuch as mankind had already begun to employ in civil tranſactions: it was when oaths and ſubſcriptions became the uſual confirmations of public deeds, that the church was warranted to make uſe of them in ſocial covenanting. As du-

ring the long period of time between Moſes who began, and the apoſtle John who cloſed the cannon of ſcripture, the improvements of human ſociety were gradually advancing; ſo the Lord condeſcended not only to render them ſubſervient to the inſtruction of the church in the metaphors, ſimilies and parables of the word; but likewiſe to preſerve a ſtriking reſemblance of many of them in thoſe ordinances which he appointed for the church's edification. But this will never warrant any to introduce the uſages of worldly kingdoms or commonwealths into the church of Chriſt, of their own accord. We are not to be bold and preſumptuous, becauſe our Lord is condeſcending. It is his authority alone that lays us under an obligation to obſerve all the ordinances that ought, at any time, to have place in the church; the reſemblance of them to human affairs ſerves only to make the obligation more eaſy and more ſuitable to our nature and ſituation.

PUBLIC Covenanting has always a particular and immediate reference to the preſent ſtate of religion: indeed, for church-members to join in covenanting, what is it other than to avow in the moſt ſolemn and the moſt determinate manner, whatever conformity to the Lord's will and word the church has already attained? Hence the hiſtory of this duty in the different periods of the church cannot be underſtood without attending to the ſtate of religion in thoſe periods.

THE truth of the following obſervation will be illuſtrated in the hiſtory of Covenanting: That poſitive inſtitutions are obſerved in the greateſt purity and perfection on the appointment of them: the after obſervation is more likely to be defective than the firſt. We have reaſon to think, that the ordinance of the Paſſover was hardly ever kept with ſo exact an attention to

all the circumſtances mentioned in the words of inſtitution, as in that night wherein the deſtroyer of the firſt-born went through the land of Egypt. The caſe is quite the reverſe with reſpect to what we call moral duties, or thoſe which we are neceſſarily led to infer from the nature and perfections of God, from our relation to him as our God and Redeemer, and from our relation to one another in him. Such duties, while the church is in an infant ſtate, while her knowledge and other attainments are ſmall, will be found to be but imperfectly underſtood, and of courſe imperfectly and indiſtinctly practiſed. But as the church advances toward maturity, grows in grace, and knows more of the Lord and of her relation to him; her knowledge of moral duties enlarges and becomes more diſtinct, and her practice of thoſe duties more adequate to the rule. Thus with regard to public Covenanting, how various the degrees of diſtinctneſs and of conformity to the rule in the manner of going about it, from the time of Enos when *men began to call upon the name of the Lord* to *the ſealing of the covenant* in the days of Nehemiah?

Of the church's Profeſſion from Adam to Abraham.

THE church of Chriſt was at firſt built upon the revelation of the covenant of grace in that illuſtrious promiſe, Gen. iii. 15. *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy ſeed and her ſeed: it ſhall bruiſe thy head, and thou ſhalt bruiſe its heel.* The hiſtory of the church, in this period, conſiſts of a very few particulars. There ſeem to have been hardly any other ſocieties for the ſtated worſhip of God, than families; the father or head of each family

being the prieſt of it. Hence we may eaſily conceive their manner of worſhipping the Lord to have been very ſimple: nor can we reaſonably expect to find church-members at this early time, obſerving any religious duty of a public nature, with all the diſtinctneſs and formality which attended the obſervance of it afterward.

We may be ſure, however, that the church held faſt the word of grace that the Lord had given her, and that ſhe profeſſed her faith with ſuch formality as the meaſure of revelation ſhe was favoured with, and the circumſtances of her lot rendered neceſſary. Abel adhered to the truth of the promiſe concerning the ſeed of the woman; and gave ſuch explicit teſtimonies, ſuch open aſſurances of that adherence in oppoſition to the unbelief, pride, envy and hypocriſy of Cain, that Cain was filled with rage, and killed his brother. The teſtimony of the church was then what it is now, and what it always will be, a torment to the ſeed of the ſerpent. But what aſſurances did Abel give Cain of his adherence to the promiſe? We read of one only; but that was ſuch as may be deemed equivalent to all the formalities of Public Covenanting in the more advanced ſtate of eccleſiaſtical and of civil ſociety: *Abel brought of the firſtlings of his flock and of the fat thereof: And the Lord had reſpect unto Abel and to his offering.* Thus that faithful martyr teſtified his adherence to the truth. As for writings, oaths and ſubſcriptions, they could as little have been underſtood, before theſe or other legal ſecurities were in uſe, as a language which never had been heard.

We have a deſcriptive hint concerning the ſtate of the church at the birth of Enos upwards of one hundred years after the death of Abel. *Then*, it is ſaid, *began men to call on the name of the Lord.* Some, indeed, have rendered the

text, *Then began men to curse the name of the Lord.* But this interpretation is far from being so natural, since the name of the Lord had been profaned by Cain and his impious posterity long before: On the contrary, the account in the same passage, of Seth and Enos, who as witnesses for the truth, were in opposition to the Cainites, leads us naturally to consider the expression as having a respect to the worship of God. So that this text points out a remarkable æra of reformation in the church. Probably several families then agreed to call on the Lord; or to call themselves by a name that served to denote their holy profession, and to distinguish them from the profane race of Cain: such a name we have in Gen. vi. 2. where the descendents of Seth, who then made up the visible church, are called, *The sons of God.* The latter explication is from the marginal reading of our translation, *Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord.*

THE remarkably gracious revelation that Noah was favoured with immediately after the flood, was such as could not suitably be received without explicit engagements to be the Lord's. Then it was that the Lord first gave the name *Covenant* to the declaration of his saving grace and kindness toward sinners of mankind; a name indeed full of consolation, sweetly intimating the Lord's condescension, love and faithfulness. This covenant consists of absolutely free promises; it is not suspended on any conditions whatever to be performed by us; the gradual accomplishment and the final result of this covenant are no less than the revelation of it, from the sovereign authority, grace and faithfulness of God. Hence we must beware of supposing that God's covenant, like men's covenants with one another, owes its effect to the compliance of the parties to whom it is proposed. If

the faith of God's elect is neceſſary in order to our enjoying of the benefits of the new covenant; the reaſon is, that faith is among the firſt of theſe benefits according to the order in which divine wisdom ſees fit to communicate them; for that noble grace is no leſs made over and ſecured to us in the promiſes of the covenant than the benefits which follow it. On this occaſion, the Lord appointed *his bow in the cloud* to be a ſign of his covenant. It ſeems to be partly on account of this appointment that the Lord here calls his gracious conſtitution a covenant: for every covenant among men is accompanied with ſome ſign, memorial, ſeal or pledge. The Lord's promiſe would naturally be conſidered as a covenant, when a viſible ſign was annexed to it. *This is the token of the covenant*: as if the Lord had ſaid, As ſurely as you behold the rainbow, ſo ſurely will I fulfil every promiſe I have made.

It is true, that temporal benefits only are here expreſly mentioned; and the rainbow is the ſign of a temporal benefit. But it was the general nature of the Old Teſtament diſpenſation to make uſe of earthly things for ſhadowing forth heavenly and ſpiritual things, Heb. x. 1. As the Lord, in his providential bounty, grants to man freely the uſe of the brute creatures, ſecurity againſt the return of the deluge, the agreeable viciſſitude of the ſeaſons, of day and night; ſo in his kindneſs toward us through Jeſus Chriſt, he gives us all the ſaving benefits of the new covenant. All mankind partake of theſe outward favours; but it is the peculiar happineſs of thoſe who by faith ſet to their ſeal that God's covenant is true, that they conſider theſe temporal benefits as promiſed bleſſings of God's covenant, as ſhadows and tokens of ſomething better, and in a word, as certainly connected (we mean as they have place in the co-

venant of grace, not as they are dispensed in common Providence) with all the blessings of grace and glory. Isai. liv. 9, 10. may be regarded as the very best comment on the Lord's covenant with Noah: *For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn, that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. The mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.* This way of considering the works of creation and providence renders the Christian's contemplation of them both delightful and improving, serving to exercise faith as well as the natural understanding.

THIS everlasting covenant (that covenant the only proper condition of which is the blood of Christ, Heb. xiii. 20.) is, indeed, said *to be between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.* These universal expressions are used to signify, that all the creatures, rational and irrational, are included in the covenant with respect to their subserviency to the great spiritual designs of it: though many of them, considered in any other respect, may properly be said to have neither lot nor part in that matter. There seems to be likewise a reference to the extent of the gospel dispensation, which was to become greater and greater till it should extend as far as the goodness of Providence in *giving rain and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness.* In this respect Isaiah says (xl. 5.) *The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.*

THE way in which Noah entered into this covenant was the same as that in which we enter into the covenant of grace still; it was by faith in the sacrifice of Christ. Had it not been for

that ſacrifice, the Lord would never have ſaid to Noah, (what he now ſays, indeed, to every ſinner that hears the goſpel) *I will make with you an everlaſting covenant.* That Noah exerciſed faith in the ſacrifice of Chriſt appears from his burnt offerings; in conſequence of which it is ſaid, *the Lord ſmelled a ſweet ſavour*, or *a ſavour of reſt.* In what? in Noah's burnt offerings? Rather in the ſacrifice of Chriſt typified by theſe burnt offerings, Epheſ. v. 2. *He gave himſelf for us an offering and a ſacrifice of a ſweet ſmelling ſavour.* Smelling, in this manner, a ſavour of reſt, the Lord revealed himſelf as eſtabliſhing his covenant with Noah, and with his ſeed after him.

ALONG with ſo gracious a revelation of the *everlaſting covenant* †, the Lord gave Noah a variety of precepts; precepts which ſeem to be ſtated in direct oppoſition to the rapine, violence and impurity which prevailed among mankind before the flood. When God's law has been remarkably tranſgreſſed in any particular manner, he would have our obedience to his law conſpicuous in oppoſition chiefly, to that manner of tranſgreſſing it.

THOUGH the Holy Ghoſt has not given us any particular account of the way in which the ſeveral members of Noah's family expreſſed their adherence to that revelation which the Lord had given them; yet as this revelation plainly called for a ſuitable profeſſion of their faith and obedience, ſo we have no reaſon to doubt tha Noah who was a *juſt man and perfect in his generation*, would require them to make that profeſſion with

† THIS epithet is given to the Covenant of grace in various other places, as in 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Iſa. lv. 3. Jerem. xxxii. 40 Heb. xiii. 20. This covenant is everlaſting in oppoſition to the covenant of works; the repreſenting head of which, the firſt Adam, being in honour, continued not: but the laſt Adam the head of this covenant, continues a quickening Spirit for ever. It is THE EVERLASTING COVENANT; there is no other covenant for our eternal ſalvation.

ſuch formality and ſolemnity as might ſerve to impreſs their minds with a juſt ſenſe of their obligations to the Lord who had ſo graciouſly revealed himſelf in his covenant with Noah.

Of the Church's Profeſſion from Abraham to Moſes.

IN courſe of time, mankind being again greatly corrupted, the pure profeſſion of the truth, as taught by Noah, was almoſt univerſally forſaken. Hitherto the church had been ſcattered here and there among mankind: her members were connected with one another by worſhipping the ſame God, and by walking according to the ſame rule; but not formally as yet, by any other outward ties than ſuch as are neceſſary in civil life, in families, or in a neighbouring ſituation. But now the Lord having determined to reſtore the purity of his truths and inſtitutions, ſaw fit in gracious ſovereignty, to call Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, in order that he might fix his church as a viſible ſociety, ſeparated from the reſt of the world, in the family of that patriarch, upon the ground of a new revelation of the covenant of grace, a revelation clearer ſtill and more particular than that which had been made to Noah.

THE church of God, from its beginning, was a ſociety of the ſame nature as it is at this day; it was always made up of perſons called out of the world, not according to their works, but according to the ſovereign purpoſe and free grace of God. The family out of which Abraham was taken was no better, no leſs groſly idolatrous, than the reſt of that degenerate world out of which he was called, Joſh. xxiv. 2. *And Joſhua ſaid unto all the people, Thus ſaith the Lord God of Iſrael, your fathers dwelt on the other*

side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Nahor: and they served other gods. Whatever may be found in the fabulous legends of the Jewish writers, or among the conjectures favourable to human pride, of our modern advocates for Arminian free will, the scripture says not a syllable of the virtue or integrity of Abraham before his calling; nay, from this passage we are led to think he was, like the rest of his father's house, a gross idolator; for it is plainly the scope of the passage to shew that the Lord's choice of the Israelites was not from a regard to any deserving qualifications that he found in them or in their fathers when he called them to be his peculiar people, but purely from his grace and sovereign good-pleasure.

When the Lord called Abraham *out of his country, and from his kindred*, he revealed to him his covenant, in which an infinitely nobler inheritance was made over to him than any he had left. In this revelation of the covenant of grace, three remarkable things were secured to Abraham. In the first place, His own personal interest in the Lord as his God: As when the Lord says, *I will bless thee; and thou shalt be a blessing. Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.* In the second place, It was secured to him, that the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent, should descend from him according to the flesh: *In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.* Thirdly, The spiritual privileges of his posterity were secured: It was promised, that in his family exclusively almost of all others, the Lord would preserve his church till the Saviour should come; that the Lord would give to those of his descendents among whom he should preserve the true religion, the land of Canaan, where they were to *dwell alone, and were not to be reckoned among the nations. I will establish*

my covenant between me and thee, and thy ſeed after thee, in their generations, for an everlaſting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy ſeed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy ſeed after thee, the land wherein thou art a ſtranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlaſting poſſeſſion; and I will be their God.

THIS covenant, like Noah's, was confirmed by a ſign or ſeal, Gen. xvii. 11. *Ye ſhall circumciſe the fleſh of your foreſkin, and it ſhall be a token of the covenant between me and you.* Rom. iv. 11. *Abraham received the ſign of circumciſion a ſeal of the righteouſneſs of the faith which he had being yet uncircumciſed.* This ſeal was of ſuch a nature, that while the Lord's grant of it to Abraham and his children, was a pledge and aſſurance of the promiſed bleſſings of the covenant, their participation of it was an evidence of their faith and obedience; for it was not merely, like the rainbow, a ſign to be contemplated, but an appointment to be obſerved. *This is my covenant, which ye ſhall keep between me and you, and thy ſeed after thee: Every manchild among you ſhall be circumciſed.* By this new circumſtance which did not attend any former revelation of the covenant, it ſeems to have been the Lord's gracious deſign to teach the Iſraelites in a ſenſible and ſtriking manner, that he wanted every one of his profeſſing people to intermeddle in the covenant, taking the Lord for his God in particular; and that they were to ſet about every piece of obedience to the divine law, as they were to obſerve circumciſion, in the way of laying hold of God's Covenant. We have the ſame circumſtance ſerving the ſame ends in the ſacraments of the new Teſtament.

THIS covenant of promiſe was the great charter of the church from Abraham to the coming of Chriſt. The revelations of the covenant of grace which were afterward made to Iſaac, to

Jacob, to Moſes, to David and the other prophets who ſpoke in the name of the Lord, had conſtantly a reference to this revelation made to Abraham. Hence the covenant of grace is often mentioned as the truth which the Lord ſpake to Abraham and to his ſeed. Hence the apoſtle calls it in Gal. iii. 14. *the bleſſing of Abraham*; in ver. 16. *the promiſes that were made to Abraham and to his ſeed*; in ver. 17. *the covenant which was confirmed by God in Chriſt*; and frequently is it called *The Promiſe*, by way of eminence, ver. 19, 22, 29. Acts ii. 39. In ſhort, this revelation of God's everlaſting covenant to Abraham was the ground on which the church of Iſrael was built; and the tenure by which ſhe held all her peculiar priveleges.

WHILE the Lord was thus revealing himſelf to Abraham as his own God, as God almighty, or alſufficient to ſupply his needs, he enjoined him, at the ſame time, to expreſs his gratitude in a courſe of new obedience, Gen. xvii. 1. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect.* The Lord who knows the heart, repreſents what Abraham ought, as what Abraham would be enabled, to do with reſpect to the inſtruction of his family, Gen. xviii. 19. *For I know him, that he will command his children and his houſhold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord to do juſtice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath ſpoken of him.*

As to Abraham's profeſſion of faith in this revelation of the everlaſting covenant, and of his obedience to theſe precepts, we have, at leaſt, ſeveral inſtructive hints. In Gen. xii. 8. it is ſaid, that *he built an altar to the Lord between Bethel and Ai, and called upon the name of the Lord*; openly profeſſing, no doubt ‡, that he

‡ It is univerſally allowed, ſays Dr. Owen in Theolog. lib. 4. cap. 1. that under the general deſcription of calling on the name of the Lord, the whole of his external worſhip, not excepting even ſacrifices, is comprehended.

was not ashamed of his confidence in the word of the Lord.

ABRAHAM's very solemn address to the king of Sodom concerning the division of the spoils they had taken, undoubtedly contained in it a declaration of his adherence to the Lord as his own God in virtue of the everlasting covenant, Gen. xiv. 22. *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from thee a thread, even to a shoe-latchet.* Two things are obvious, and seem to be intended by the Holy Ghost in recording this declaration of Abraham. One is, that the patriarch describes the divine Being to whom he swore, in the same terms as Melchizedec had use in blessing him; *Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.* The same terms repeated in the same passage, lead us to think that Melchisedec and Abram had the same object in view. But it was undoubtedly the God who made the covenant with Abram, God in Christ, in whose name that memorable blessing was pronounced. The other thing is, that this oath appears to have been of the nature of a vow. It was not to the king of Sodom that Abram lifted up his hand, but to the Lord: Abram, in order to shew that what he had done in his late atchievement against the kings, did not proceed from any selfish or interested views, but from a single regard to the glory of his God, had pledged himself to the Lord, that he would not touch the spoils. The king of Sodom was so far from being the party to whom the oath was made, that it is not said, he was so much as a witness of it.

WE have a very plain and explicit profession of Abraham's faith in his instructions to the eldest servant of his household with respect to the affair of taking a wife to his son Isaac: *The*

Lord God of heaven who took me from my father's houſe, and from the land of my kindred, and who ſpoke unto me, and who ſware unto me, ſaying, Unto thy ſeed will I give this land, he ſhall ſend his angel before thee. This declaration plainly implies that he gloried in his covenant-relation to the Lord, as a ſatisfying ſecurity for all the bleſſings of grace and providence †.

We may conſider the ſigns or memorials which the patriarchs left behind them wherever they journeyed, memorials of the Lord's kindneſs to them, and of their obligations to him; as ſo many profeſſions or teſtimonies of their faith and obedience. Of this kind were theſe; the grove that Abraham planted in Beerſheba, and the altar that he built in the land of Moriah; the pillar that Jacob erected at Bethel; the name Peniel which he gave to one place, and Mahanaim the name which he gave to another. In theſe times of ſimplicity, ſtones were ſet up, altars and heaps were made, trees were planted, names were given to places, in order to perpetuate the memory of particular actions or events: theſe were the firſt public records; theſe the hiſtories of the patriarchal age.

† To the above obſervations concerning Abraham we may add, that it is not a ſingular opinion to conſider that patriarch as a covenanter. Mr. Pemble may be admitted as an unexceptionable ſample of our old Proteſtant divines. "After "that men," ſays that judicious writer in his treatiſe of Juſtification, "had now almoſt forgot God's promiſe and their "own duty, and idolatry had crept into theſe families wherein "by ſucceſſion the church of God had continued, God calls "forth Abraham from amongſt his idolatrous kindred, and "with him renews that former promiſe in form of a league "and covenant, confirmed by word and ſolemn ceremonies. "God on one ſide, promiſing to be the God of Abraham and "of his ſeed; Abraham, for his part, believing the promiſe, "and accepting the condition of obedience," or coming under engagements, "to walk before God in uprightneſs." The word Condition is uſed here and by many writers, not in a proper ſenſe, but only to ſignify the indiſpenſible neceſſity of obedience according to the order of the new covenant.

THE revelation of the covenant of promiſe, which the Lord made to Abraham, was afterward renewed to Iſaac, Gen. xxvi. 24. and to Jacob, Gen. xxviii. 12, 13, 14, 15. Each of theſe new revelations had an expreſs reference to former revelations, particularly to Abraham's covenant.

IT was immediately after a new revelation of the covenant of grace that Jacob made his remarkable vow: *Jacob vowed a vow, ſaying, ſince God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on; ſince I ſhall come again to my father's houſe in peace; and ſince the Lord will be my God: therefore, this ſtone which I have ſet up for a pillar ſhall be God's houſe: and of all which thou ſhalt give me, I will ſurely give the tenth unto thee.* Here we have a profeſſion of faith in the Lord's promiſe, and grounded on the promiſe, a reſolution of doing ſomething to evidence his grateful ſenſe of the divine grace and mercy; and both theſe under the ſolemn form of a vow. This example is very inſtructive: it ſhews us, that in vowing to the Lord, it is not enough that we come under a general obligation to believe the Lord's revelation of the new covenant, and to perſevere in a courſe of new obedience; we ſhould likewiſe come under ſuch particular obligations according to circumſtances, as may evidence the ſincerity of our general profeſſion to follow the Lord. Jacob here ſpecifies ſeveral things; as firſt, his confidence in the favour of Providence with regard to the ſucceſs of his journey: Secondly, his conſecration of the ſtone he had ſet up for a pillar, to be God's houſe: Thirdly, his promiſe to give the Lord the tenth of all he ſhould poſſeſs.

JACOB ſhewed his zeal for the pure profeſſion of the true religion in the exhortation he deli-

vered to his family, when he was about to go up to Bethel: *Then Jacob ſaid unto his houſhold, and to all that were with him, Put away the ſtrange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments. And let us ariſe, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who anſwered me in the day of my diſtreſs, and was with me in the way that I went.*

In this exhortation, the godly patriarch's aim, is evidently to prevail on his family to cleave more reſolutely to the Lord, to his worſhip and ſervice, and to avow ſuch adherence more explicitly, than they had ever done before.

The ſucceſs that attended Jacob's exhortation was remarkable: *They gave unto Jacob all the ſtrange Gods which were in their hand, and all their ear-rings which were in their ears: and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.* What the members of Jacob's family did on this occaſion, gave an evidence of their diſpoſition to follow the Lord; an evidence which, conſidering their circumſtances, was equally ſatisfying as oaths and formal declarations would be, in other circumſtances.

The bleſſings that Jacob pronounced upon his children, foretelling not only their outward lot, but how the true religion ſhould be preſerved among them, till the coming of Shiloh, may be conſidered as belonging to the church's profeſſion in that age, and would, no doubt, be accordingly held faſt by every true church-member. *The teſtimony of Jeſus is the ſpirit of prophecy.* Prophecy, indeed, ſeemed to characteriſe the Old Teſtament diſpenſation; as the fulfilment of prophecy characteriſes the new.

To the examples we have given in this period, we may add that of Job. He was probably contemporary with Iſaac and Jacob: it is almoſt

certain, that he lived before the written law, and before the Lord's limitation of his visible church to the people of Israel, since in the whole book of Job, there is not a single reference or allusion either to that law or to that peculiar people. It is clear, that this eminent person was far from thinking it improper to bind himself by solemn oath to the performance of particular duties. He does so, or narrates that he had done so, as a testimony to his friends of his integrity, and as a mean of confirming himself in the ways of wisdom, chap. xxvii. 2, 3, 4. *As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment, and the Almighty who hath vexed my soul; all the while my breath is in me, and the spirit is in my nostrils; my lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.* Chap. xxx. 1. *I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*

Of the Revelation which the Lord gave to the Church by Moses.

THE church's profession was placed in a still fairer light by the ministry of Moses. Of a sudden she was raised from the lowest and basest condition of Egyptian slavery to a degree of beauty and glory she had never attained before. So wonderful was the divine interposition by which the children of Israel were brought out of the house of bondage, and their church-state rendered more conspicuous, that it is often mentioned as one of the most glorious manifestations of JEHOVAH'S arm, and may well be considered as a proper emblem of the Lord's kindness in bringing us out of a state of nature into a state of grace.

THE Lord declares that it was upon the footing of the covenant of grace, as it had been revealed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, that he did such wonderful things for his people, Exodus ii. 24. *God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.* And iii. 16. *Say unto the elders of Israel,* (this is the divine commission to Moses) *The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob appeared unto me.* Hence it is apparent, that the legation of Moses was indeed, an administration of the covenant of grace.

IT is true, this legation is often called *The giving of the law,* John i. 17. Gal. iii. 17. and iv. 24. The reason of this is, neither that there were no precepts delivered to the church before Moses, nor yet that the promises of the new covenant were neglected by Moses: for it is evident, that in the patriarchal age, the church was instructed in the law of God as the rule of duty; and we meet with many great and precious promises, many abstracts of the everlasting covenant, in the writings of Moses: But the true reason is, that the exhibition of the law serves to characterise the Mosaic revelation, being the larger and more conspicuous part of it: nay, so much did the law prevail in the outward form or appearance of this dispensation, that the whole covenant of promise was delineated in a system of ceremonial institutions, and the figures and shadows of good things to come were enjoined on the Israelites as rules of practice. Thus God's revelation of the new covenant to Abraham is called *The giving of the promise;* not that there were no promises given to the church before Abraham; or that the divine revelation to Abraham consisted of promises only without any precepts; but because the promise

was more largely and more clearly revealed to him than it ever had been before.

How the Law given by Moſes is to be conſidered.

THE Lord's revelation of the law by the hand of Moſes is, in ſcripture, plainly repreſented to us in theſe two lights.

1. IT was a revelation of the law as a covenant of works, or a condition of life, demonſtrative of the majeſty, authority and holineſs of the moſt high God. Hence the apoſtle ſays, *the covenant from the mount Sinai gendereth to bondage.* Hence the tremenduous circumſtances that attended the promulgation of the law, Exod. xix. 16,—20. and xx. 18. This was not an uſeleſs pomp; the deſign of it was to convince the Iſraelites of their abſolute need of the promiſe, and of a mediator between God and them. From the day that the Lord had ſent Moſes to the children of Iſrael, he had ſtill been dealing with them upon the ground of his gracious promiſe to Abraham, to Iſaac, and to Jacob, and he wanted the Iſraelites to deal with him upon the ſame ground. At the beginning, indeed, of this tranſaction, forgetful of the plague of their own hearts, and much under the dominion of legal pride, they ſeemed preſumptuouſly ready, without regarding the promiſe, to deal with God as a lawgiver only, engaging to obey all his commands, Exod. xix. 7, 8. *And Moſes came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all theſe words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people anſwered together, and ſaid, All that the*

Lord hath ſpoken we will do. But the Lord having given them an awful and magnificent diſplay of his glorious majeſty and holineſs, they or ſuch at leaſt, as were brought to fall in with the gracious deſign of that amazing tranſaction, found themſelves under a neceſſity of fleeing to the free promiſe in which their fathers hoped, and to a mediator between God and them; for, ſays the apoſtle, Heb. xii. 19. *When they heard the voice of words, they intreated that the word ſhould not be ſpoken to them any more:* they ſaw, that it was impoſſible for them to deal with God immediately as a lawgiver: hence they intreated Moſes to interpoſe between God and them, Exod. xx. 19. *And they ſaid unto Moſes, Speak thou with us and we will hear: But let not God ſpeak with us leſt we die.* The Lord, indeed, commanded the Iſraelites to receive the law; but by no means as a covenant of works, or a condition of life; for to receive it in that view would have been to act as if the promiſe made to Abraham had been annulled and invain; while by ſuch receiving of the law is meant the conſidering of our perſonal obedience to it as a condition the performance of which is neceſſary to enſure the enjoyment of bleſſings from the Lord: but if the Iſraelites had conſidered their obedience to the law in this light, they would, on the matter, have denied, that the promiſe made to Abraham was a ſufficient ſecurity for theſe bleſſings; or, in other words, they would have held the promiſe to be diſannulled. The truth is, the Lord gave them a revelation of himſelf, according to the covenant of works, as a conſuming fire; that, like the cherubim and flaming ſword that turned every way, it might be a mean of diſſuading them from every attempt to ſeek ſalvation in the way of that covenant. The law, then, was ſo far from diſannulling the promiſe that had been made to A-

braham 430 years before, that it was given in such a manner as to be a powerful incitement to the faith of that unchangeable promise. The thunders, the lightenings, the blackness and darkness and tempest, and all the display that was given on this occasion, of Jehovah as glorious in holiness, and of terrible majesty, might have served to shew the Israelites, that though they were now to receive a more complete system of laws * than their fathers possessed, yet they were to put as little trust in their own obedience for their justification and acceptance with God, as their fathers did; and that they, like their fathers, were still to have access to the Lord and to receive every blessing at his hand, on the single ground of his merciful, free and absolute promise.

2. IT was a revelation of the rule according to which the Israelites were to walk, and by which they were to evidence themselves to be the Lord's peculiar people. The display of the divine majesty and authority, which was intended to drive them from the law as a covenant of works, or as it was inconsistent with the promise made to Abraham, served at the same time, to bind them to an universal obedience to the law as a rule of life, agreeable to that free and gracious promise; a promise which every believing Israelite regarded as a sufficient security not only for his pardon and acceptance with God, but likewise for whatever was necessary to the acceptable performance of duty. While the believing Israelite saw the rule of his conduct in the law, he saw his own conformity to that rule, (more or less clearly indeed, according to the measure of his faith) abundantly secured in the promise; and that conformity to the rule still proved, in the issue, to be steady or wavering, ac-

* Vain man is prone to think that he needs no more to qualify him for the performance of duty than to be informed of it; tho' that information has frequently no other effect than to irritate and inflame his corruptions.

cording to his faith in the promise: because faith is the appointed way in which we experience the benefit of the promise.

Of the Nature of the various Precepts given by Moses.

VARIOUS laws had formerly been given to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, and had been handed down by oral tradition from generation to generation. But now the Lord's will as to the right manner of worshipping and serving him, being revealed anew, that it might be no more subject to the uncertainty of oral tradition, was committed to writing. So ample was this written word, including all the revelations of the covenant of grace which the Lord had given to the patriarchs, that the church had no need of any new institution, or of any new doctrine, till Shiloh came, the great prophet whom the Lord was to raise up like unto Moses.

OF the laws given by Moses to the children of Israel, some regarded only the relation between God and them as individuals; while others, besides that, regarded likewise their relation to one another in society. Their relation to one another in society was of two kinds. The first was peculiar to themselves, as the church of the living God, separated from the rest of the world to preserve the pure profession of religion. The laws, regulating the conduct of the Israelites in this relation, were all those with respect to the public worship, the discipline and the government of the church. Some of these being shadows of good things to come, and a kind of emblematical predictions of the Lord Christ, were abolished upon the fulfil-

ment of them in him: Others are of perpetual obligation, the grounds and the ends of them being perpetual. The former are called ceremonial laws, the latter moral.

THE second kind of relation to one another, was common to the Iſraelites with the reſt of mankind, that of civil ſociety. The laws regulating the conduct of the Iſraelites in this relation, are uſually called *The Judicial laws.* Some of theſe had ſuch reſpect to the peculiar circumſtances of the Iſraelitiſh commonwealth, that they can hardly be applied with propriety, in the government of any other ſtate: Such are the laws with reſpect to the diviſion of the lands, with reſpect to the ſucceſſion to inheritances, and various others. But ſome of them, plainly founded on the principles of equity, are of univerſal obligation in civil ſociety: ſuch are the laws of retaliation in judging between man and man, of puniſhing murder with death, of offering peace on reaſonable terms before we make war on any nation. The ſpirit of ſome of their laws is binding upon other nations, though not the form. Thus it is not neceſſary, that every country ſhould have ten cities of refuge; but it is neceſſary, that the criminal laws of every country ſhould diſtinguiſh between man-ſlaughter and murder.

As all the laws of Moſes, ſo in particular theſe political inſtitutions were delivered to Iſrael not immediately conſidered as a civil ſociety, but to Iſrael conſidered as the church of the living and true God. The whole of that revelation of the Lord's will of which theſe political inſtitutions are a part, was given to the church, to that people to whom the Lord ſays, (what he could never be conſidered as ſaying to any people viewed merely as a civil ſociety) *I am the Lord thy God.* It is to the church alone that the Lord reveals himſelf in ſo gracious a manner. The truth is, theſe political

inſtitutions were to ſhew how the Iſraelites, or church-members under the Moſaic diſpenſation, were to behave in civil ſociety, a ſituation common to them with the reſt of mankind; and to ſhew what conſtitution and order in their commonwealth would be ſubſervient to the good of the church, and to the ſanctification of church-members, aſſuring them at the ſame time, that his particular providence would be always preſent to them, and would often work miracles to promote that ſubſerviency.

Of the Jewiſh State.

THE children of Iſrael reſiding in the land of Egypt, were members of the Egyptian ſtate. They were not called, in that ſituation, to attempt altering the conſtitution and laws of the ſtate, in order to ſerve the church: their duty was only to abſtain from every thing inconſiſtent with the character of church-members, while they were to make conſcience of obedience to the lawful commands of Pharaoh and ſubordinate rulers. But when the Lord brought them out of the houſe of bondage, and formed them into an independent ſtate, it is reaſonable to expect that the conſtitution and laws of that ſtate would be ſubordinated to the good of the church.

THE laws of the Jewiſh ſtate afford, in this reſpect, an example for our imitation. If ever it falls to the ſhare of church-members to frame the laws of a ſtate, they undoubtedly ought ſo to frame theſe laws as to promote, in every reaſonable and peaceable way, the true intereſt, that is, the purity of the church. Such legiſlators would be workers together with God, who manages the whole

kingdom of providence in subserviency to the church's good.

THIS subserviency, being injoined by their laws, appeared afterward in the following circumstances: in the subjects of the commonwealth being, for the most part, church members, descendents of Jacob; in the name of Israel being common to the church and the commonwealth; in the active part that their civil magistrates took in the reformation of the church.

BUT notwithstanding this subserviency, we are by no means to consider the Jewish state as partaking of the nature of the church; but rather as one of the kingdoms of this world, as our Lord plainly intimated when he said, *My kingdom is not of this world*, in answer to the accusation, that he had pretended to be king of the Jews, John xviii. 35, 36. Christ came to change the dispensation of the church, but by no means, (as the carnal Jews might imagine in their fond expectations of a Messiah attended with worldly pomp and grandeur) to change the forms of civil government.

As all the church-members to whom the political institutions of Moses were immediately delivered, belonged to the Jewish commonwealth, so we need not wonder to find these institutions peculiarly suited to the situation of that commonwealth. But as they are an important part of that revelation which the Lord has given not to the Jews only, but to his whole church scattered over the face of the earth, and which by means of the church is exhibited to all mankind, they are binding by divine authority upon every state, so far as they are suitable to its constitution; so far as they rise necessarily out of the general principles of equity; so far as they may be requisite to secure that which ought to be the great and important end of all the restraints that men suffer from laws and forms of government, the enjoyment of the sweets of liber-

ty; and, I dare not forbear adding, so far as they are subservient to the good of the church, according to the dispensation of grace and of providence, whatever it may be, that she is under.

To suppose that the Lord was to the Hebrew commonwealth instead of a visible chief magistrate, seems to be at variance with fact: for after Moses, by the advice of Jethro, had settled the mode of civil government among the Israelites, they never were without magistrates both supreme and subordinate. It is remarkable that the counsel of Jethro, upon which the civil constitution of Israel was formed, was not communicated as an immediate revelation from God, but as the native dictates of that common sense of justice and of order which is the foundation of all the civil government in the world.

It is true, when the men of Israel desired Gideon to take upon him the government of their state, offering to make it hereditary in his family, he generously refused the offer, saying, *The Lord shall rule over you*, Judg. viii. 22, 23. Intimating that they were to be ruled, not by the will of one man, but by the laws which they had received from God himself; nor was their government to be administered by one man, but in the manner of a republic, by their judges and elders, with the consent of the people. Considered as a church, the Lord ruled over them; and Gideon would not have them acknowledge any other monarch. In like manner, when the Israelites desired a king in the days of Samuel, the Lord said to the prophet, *They have not rejected thee; but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.* They may be said to have rejected the Lord that he should not reign over them, if, having lost sight of the spiritual glory and beauty of the Lord's kingly authority over them as his church, they ceased to delight in it, affecting rather the worldly grandeur of the nations around them, that were govern-

ed by kings. They may be said to have rejected the Lord on this occasion, if they neglected to acknowledge him, or to ask counsel of him in taking so important a step as that of changing the mode of their civil government. In this respect, the Lord says, speaking of this very matter, Hosea viii. 6. *They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not.* They may be said to have rejected the Lord's kingly authority over them, if they were either wanting in the respect that was due to Samuel as a civil judge, or deaf to the messages that he brought them from the Lord as a prophet. Something of this kind seems to be implied in the Lord's saying that they had not rejected Samuel only.

WE may take notice of a fact which strongly implies that the Hebrew state as to its intrinsic nature, whatever extraordinary circumstances attended the administration of it, was a mere worldly society formed and conducted upon the maxims of human policy. The fact is, that the reasons the elders of Israel gave to Samuel for the resolution they had taken of setting up the monarchical form of government, were no immediate revelations from heaven, but considerations of ordinary prudence. —1 Samuel viii. 5. *They said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king like all the nations.* Considering that the question here, was not merely concerning a step in the public administration, but it was concerning a change in the internal constitution of the government: considering that the elders representing the children of Israel, being gathered together, exercised a right of deliberating, and making a resolution on that question; considering, in fine, that the Israelites do not seem to have been wrong in taking upon them to exercise such a right, as it is reasonable to think the Lord allowed it in granting their desire; though he blamed

them for their motives or their manner of exercising that right; for these reasons, we are led by this example, to regard the Hebrew commonwealth as of the same internal nature, proceeding upon the same political principles, as other civil societies.

We need not be surprized, that in the history of the Israelites, we have a train of such extraordinary interpositions of Providence in the conduct of their civil affairs, as we have no example of in any authentic histories of other nations. They had a circumstance in their case which never was in the case of any nation since the resurrection of Christ, and never will be till his second coming; the members of the Jewish commonwealth, from Moses to the coming of Christ, made up very nearly the whole visible church of God upon earth. The preservation of the true religion was the great end for which this commonwealth was erected. Though that ought to be one principal end of the erection of every commonwealth wherever the true religion is known, yet since the Jewish commonwealth was distinguished, in that respect, from all the contemporary states and kingdoms in the world, we need not wonder to find it the distinguished care of providence.

Once more, let us consider the civil constitution of Israel as one of those temporal benefits, which the Lord had freely promised to his church long before that constitution existed, and which he bestowed upon church-members according to his word. We cannot reasonably suppose that this circumstance would alter the nature of such a temporal benefit, more than the nature of a fruitful soil; that it would turn either the one or the other into a spiritual blessing; or make it quite a different thing in the land of Israel from what it was in any other country. Surely a civil constitution is a temporal benefit, whether in Judea, in Greece, or in Italy. We acknowledge, indeed,

that this circumstance, namely, that the civil constitution of Israel was a promised blessing of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, had two remarkable effects. The first is, frequent interpositions of Heaven for the defence or the improvement of that constitution; as in the Lord's designation of some of their kings, in his destruction of their enemies, in the counsel that he gave them with respect to perplexed and intricate cases. But indeed the care of that special providence that watched continually over the church of Israel and over each of her members, was no less about other temporal benefits than about their civil government. The fruitfulness of their lands, for example, depended on the former and the latter rain: they were successful or otherwise in their undertakings, they were afflicted or comforted in their outward lot, according to the regard they had to the Lord and his law. Though God's dealing with his church in this manner, seems to have characterised, in some measure, the old Testament dispensation; yet it was not peculiar to that dispensation: the promise of the good things of this life, is often repeated in the new Testament: Matt. v. 5. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Eph. vi. 2, 3. *Honour thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee; and that thou mayest live long on the earth.* 1 Cor. iii. 22. *Things present or things to come; all are yours.* 1 Tim. iv 8 *Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.* 1 Pet. iii. 10. *He that will live long, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.* Though we are by no means to judge of the Lord's love or hatred by any thing that is seen; yet we have reason from scripture and experience to assert that the Lord, as well under the new as under the old Testament, takes occasion, in the course of his adorable providence, to

ſhew his pleaſure in his people's aims at obedience, and his anger for preſumptuous breaches of his law, Amos iii. 2. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will puniſh you for your iniquities.* 1 Cor. xi. 30. *For this cauſe* (for partaking of the Lord's ſupper unworthily) *many are weak and ſickly among you, and many ſleep.* Not that the Lord deals with his people according to the rules of merit and demerit; but he carries on his moral government of the world, by thus, in ſome meaſure, marking the difference between right and wrong: by this method too, he teaches his people the exceeding hatefulneſs of ſin, and how much they owe to Chriſt their Saviour, upon whom was the chaſtiſement of their peace; he teaches them that wiſdom's ways are pleaſantneſs and peace, and leads them to pray with Jabez, *Keep me from evil that it may not grieve me.*

THE ſecond effect ariſing from the civil conſtitution of the Iſraelites being among the temporal benefits made over to them by promiſe, is, That the church was warranted to conſider it as a type or ſhadow of ſomething better to come. Thus Jeruſalem on earth typified the Jeruſalem which is above: and ſeveral perſons who made a figure in the ſtate, were types of Chriſt, ſuch as Samſon, David, Solomon, Zerubbabel, and others. But this was a particular conſideration of the ſtate, for the uſe of the church only; which did not in the leaſt affect the internal nature of the ſtate. For example, David was a type of Chriſt in reſpect of his government of the Iſraelites. Yet this did not hinder his government from being in itſelf of the ſame political nature as that of other kings. In a word, whenever we ſpeak of the Jewiſh ſtate being typical, we do not ſpeak of its internal nature, but only of a certain light in which it was appointed to be conſidered by the church for her edification.

IN order to clear the Jewiſh law againſt idolators from the charge of intolerance, it has been ſaid, that the government of the Jewiſh ſtate was the peculiar, immediate government of God, and (which no mere man may do) he enforced his laws by whatever penalties he pleaſed. But, beſides that the notion of God's immediate government of the Jewiſh ſtate conſidered abſtractly from the church, appears to be utterly ungrounded, this account of the matter is very unſatisfying in other reſpects. Intolerance is a breach of the moral law, being contrary to the cleareſt dictates of juſtice and humanity; and therefore muſt be perpetually evil; equally ſo under the old as under the new Teſtament diſpenſation: ſo that it is not conceivable that the Lord would give a place to any thing *really* intolerant among the laws of the Jewiſh ſtate. It ſhould be likewiſe obſerved, that the crime, in queſtion, is no leſs than an open avowed breach of the firſt commandment of the moral law, a commandment of the ſame obligation at all times, and on all perſons; and that the reaſons aſſigned in this law for ſtoning the idolator, are all of a moral nature, equally ſuitable to all nations and to all ages. Deut. xiii. 10. *And thou ſhalt ſtone him with ſtones that he die; becauſe he hath ſought to thruſt thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the houſe of bondage. And all Iſrael ſhall hear, and fear, and ſhall do no more any ſuch wickedneſs as is among you.* The whole law, as was obſerved before, was given to the church of Iſrael, and therefore when the Lord is directing her members how to behave in the ſtate, he ſtill denominates himſelf the Lord their God, who had done wonders of mercy for them. Thus it is common in the new Teſtament to exhort and encourage perſons to the duties of civil life from the conſideration of their obligations to God in Chriſt. Servants are to obey their maſters according to the fleſh, as thoſe who have to

ſerve the Lord Chriſt, Col. iii. 22, 23, 24. Conſider the reaſons of this law in ſuch an evangelical light, and the force of them is not diminiſhed, but greatly increaſed under the new Teſtament diſpenſation. Or conſider them as applicable only to the ſtate of the Iſraelites: in this view the import of them is, that the good providence of God had laid them under unſpeakable obligations; having delivered them from ſlavery, formed them into a commonwealth, and countenanced them in all their journeys: therefore they were by no means to allow any to ſeduce the members of the commonwealth from the acknowledgment of the true God. Surely gratitude to Providence is equally due from all ſtates and kingdoms at all times.

Perhaps it would be better to deny that any real intolerance or perſecution is favoured by this law. It is intolerance or perſecution to hinder a perſon from living quietly, becauſe he is known to entertain ſome opinion different from theſe generally received in the country; even though his *noſtrum* has no tendency to diſturb the peace of ſociety. But the evil condemned by this law is not, in general, opinions different from theſe received among the Jews; it is idolatry, a practice which implies a denial of God even according to the notions of his attributes and providence which men have from the light of nature. A groſs idolator would deprive civil ſociety of almoſt all the advantages that it receives from the belief of God. Farther, the criminal, in this caſe, is deſcribed not only as having idolatrous opinions, but as doing all he can to propagate them, perſuading thoſe whom he converſes with, not only to receive ſuch opinions, but to put them openly in practice. Beſides, the Iſraelites were diſtinguiſhed, in reſpect of idolatry, from all the nations around them; ſo that an idolator or one who ſaid, Let us go after other gods, might ſerve as a deſcriptive name of an ene-

my to the Iſraelitiſh commonwealth. If we regard the execution of this law, the only perſons we read of being put to death for idolatry, were guilty of other crimes; and an impartial enquiry into their character and conduct would ſhew them to have been equally enemies to the church and the ſtate of Iſrael; ſuch were queen Athaliah and Baal's prieſts. We cannot argue from this law againſt idolatry, that there was no toleration among the Iſraelites, more than we could argue from the penal ſtatutes againſt Popery before the late repeal of them, that there was no toleration in Britain; though it is an undeniable fact, that there never was an age or country in which a greater freedom of religious opinions has been enjoyed than in Britain ſince the glorious revolution. We do not read of any being forced to conform to the ceremonial inſtitutions of the Jewiſh church. Strangers were permitted to live among the Iſraelites, and they were commanded to be kind to ſtrangers; there is not a ſyllable about compelling ſuch gueſts to conform to the religious profeſſion of the Jews. Joſhua and the princes entered into a league with the Gibeonites, without once requiring the Gibeonites to conform to their church. As to the penalty of cutting off, under which many of the ceremonial inſtitutions are enjoined, the beſt interpreters underſtand it of church-cenſure. Upon the whole, we cannot conceive that the Iſraelites, the moſt enlightened people then on the face of the earth, were againſt toleration, or that they did not know that the church was a voluntary ſociety, and that perſons could never become church-members otherwiſe than by free and deliberate choice. As it is undoubtedly the will of God that the kingdoms of men ſhould be ſubſervient to the church of Chriſt; the toleration we mean is a toleration conſiſtent with the diligent endeavours of the ſtate to diſcourage errors in religion, aud to promote the truths of Chriſt, by all means compatible

with the security and liberty of every honest member of civil society on the one hand, and on the other with the free and independent nature of the church as a kingdom not of this world. That persecution is none of these means is too obvious to need any proof.

Of the Jewish Church.

SUCH was the commonwealth of Israel. Let us now turn our attention on the church to which the whole Mosaic revelation was made, to which the Lord declared, *I am the Lord thy God*, and the members of which, agreeably to that declaration, *avouched the Lord to be their God.*

THE church of Christ under the Mosaic œconomy, as far as she was conformable to the pattern shewn in the mount, was indeed a spiritual and heavenly society. Though she was less perfect, from her carnal ordinances and her worldly sanctuary, than the new Testament church, yet she was of the same spiritual and heavenly nature. The church had always a respect to Christ alone as her head, to his word as her only rule, and to a future state of glory as her perfection. The government of the church is the true Theocracy. Besides a God in Christ, Zion never had, and never will have a sovereign in whom her children are to be joyful, Psal. cxlix. 2. The language of the church under every dispensation is that of the spouse, *Cause me to hear thy voice ; until the day break, and the shadows flee away ; turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.*

GENTLE as the government is of the church's head and lawgiver, he is a most absolute monarch ; and it is infinitely proper that he should be so, since

in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: he has varied his manner of governing the church as his infinite wisdom hath seen fit. He orders it so, that his church grows to maturity by degrees, and he varies his mode of administration according to the several stages of that growth. The patriarchal age was the infancy of the church; under the Mosaic dispensation, though she was considerably grown, yet she was still in childhood under tutors and governors; but under the new Testament, compared to what she was under former dispensations, she is arrived at maturity. The spiritual nature of the church, and the alone sovereignty of Christ over her, though not so conspicuous in some of these periods as in others of them, were in reality always the same.

FROM these observations it is apparent, that the church of Israel was distinct from the state. The church was grounded upon the Lord's revelation of the covenant of grace; the state, upon those principles of justice and humanity which are, in a great measure, the foundation of all the civil societies among mankind. The former was of a spiritual, the latter of a worldly nature. The end of the one is heavenly, that of the other, earthly happiness. As church-members, the Israelites never owed subjection to any as their king besides the Lord Christ; but as members of the state, they owed subjection, in all lawful commands, to a succession of civil magistrates, who were sometimes good sometimes evil, at one period professing the true religion, at another heathens and propagators of abominable idolatry. The administration of the state was placed in the hands of kings, of judges, or the heads of tribes; the administration of the church in the hands of prophets, priests, Levites and scribes. The judicatories of the state were different from those of the church, Deuter. xvii. 8, 9. *If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment,——then shalt thou arise, and get thee*

into the place which the Lord thy God ſhall chooſe : and thou ſhalt come unto the prieſts the Levites, that is, to the eccleſiaſtical judicature, *and unto the judge*, or civil magiſtrate, *who ſhall be in thoſe days and enquire ; and they ſhall ſhew thee the ſentence of judgment.* Much light is given to this paſſage by another in 2 Chron. xix. 8, 11. *Moreover, in Jeruſalem did Jehoſhaphat ſet of the Levites and of the prieſts, and of the chief of the fathers of Iſrael, for the judgment of the Lord and for controverſies.* It ſeems to be meant here, that the judgment of the Lord ſhould belong *to the Levites and the prieſts ;* but that controverſies between man and man ſhould be decided by ſuch as were *of the chief of the fathers.* This is agreeable to the royal inſtructions, ver. 11. *And behold, Amaziah the chief prieſt is over you in all matters of the Lord ; and Zebadiah the ſon of Iſhmael, the ruler of the houſe of Judah for all the kings matters.* The matters of the Lord, the head of the church, may well ſignify matters of religion ; the matters of the king, the head of the ſtate, may well ſignify affairs relating to civil life. The regulations of the ſtate, as we have ſeen, were different from the ordinances of the church. Among the latter was national covenanting *.

* The foregoing obſervations are offered on the nature of the church and the ſtate of Iſrael, becauſe much of the cavilling in the controverſial writings againſt the duty of Public Covenanting proceeds upon ſtrange miſrepreſentations of that church and of that ſtate ; becauſe right views of theſe are very conducive toward a profitable reading of the old Teſtament ; and becauſe of late it ſeems to have grown faſhionable to repreſent the church and ſtate of Iſrael in ſuch a light as to render almoſt all the approved examples of both the one and the other improper for our imitation, and conſequently to deprive us of the benefit of a great part of the old Teſtament.

At the ſame time, it muſt be owned, that ſuch an enquiry does not ſeem neceſſary in order to eſtabliſh the morality of Covenanting. An adverſary to this duty gains nothing by declaiming about the typical ſtate and the mere earthly ceremonial church of Iſrael ; unleſs he can go ſo far as to aſſert, That the one was ſo thoroughly typical, and the other ſo thoroughly ceremonial, that all they did and all they were commanded to do was nothing but mere type and ceremony, which we have nothing to do with.

Of the Engagement to duties which the children of Israel entered into at Sinai.

WE have considered the revelation which the Lord gave to Israel by the hand of Moses; a revelation that contained a repetition of the promise made to Abraham, together with a compleat system of laws regulating the conduct of that peculiar people both in the church and in the state. We are now to take notice of the manner in which they expressed their submission and adherence to that revelation; which manner is called their covenanting with the Lord, or their avouching of him to be their God.

THE awful and rigorous manifestation of the law as a covenant of works, convinced the trembling Israelites, that it was not for them to deal with God absolutely as a lawgiver, Deut. v. 24, 25, 26, 27. *And ye said, Behold the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?* (A confession this, that they were utterly unable to deal with God for themselves, much like that of David, *Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified.*) *Go thou near*, added the people, *and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear and do*,

In these words, besides a renunnciation of the covenant of works, we may observe, that the Israelites avow their interest in God according to the promise, still calling him, in the language of faith, THE LORD OUR GOD; that they desire a Mediator to deal with God on their behalf; and in the way of taking the Lord for their God, they promise, (not indeed with that legal pride and foolish forwardness which attended their former engagement, Exod. xix. 8. but with such modesty and caution as manifested an humbling sense of their own weakness and sinfulness, they promise) to yield a willing obedience, saying, *We will hear and do.* The obedience they engage to is the obedience of faith: they were in the first place, to hear, that is, to believe; for so the word is used in Isai. lv. 3. *Hear, and your soul shall live.* Gal. iii. 2. *Received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith* ‡. Thus the engagement of the Israelites corresponded to God's declaration of the ten commandments; the latter beginning with a revelation of the Lord as their God and Redeemer, the former with a believing acceptance of that revelation.

THE Lord testifies his approbation of the people's engagement, Deut. v. 28. *And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken,* that is, in fleeing to the promise of the covenant of grace, in desiring a mediator, and engaging to receive the law at his mouth. *O that there were such an heart in them!* We need not doubt that the Lord still takes notice, in a gracious manner, of our essays toward the performance of the duty of covenanting. Applying to this sub-

‡ SEE Mr. Boston's notes on the Marrow of modern divinity, chap. 2. sect. 2.

ject, what the apoſtle ſays of prayer, 1 John v. 14. *This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we* enter into covenant with the Lord as our God in Chriſt, *according to his will, he heareth us*, and accepts of the weakeſt, if honeſt, endeavours.

WHO are they now, that know and acknowledge the Lord to be their God? Who are they that deal with God through a Mediator? Who are they that avow their obedience to the law, as in the hand of a Mediator? Whoſe character do all theſe things mark? The character of the Iſraelites in the church, or in the ſtate? In the church undoubtedly.

HEAR how the Lord himſelf repreſents this covenant between himſelf and Iſrael. Speaking to Iſrael, he ſays, *Thou haſt avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his ſtatutes, and his commandments, and judgments, and to hearken to his voice. And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promiſed thee, and that thou ſhouldſt keep all his commandments.*

THIS was a covenant of gratitude and thankfulneſs. It was by no means the import of it, that the children of Iſrael conſented to yield obedience to the law of Moſes as the condition upon which they were to inherit the land of Canaan. A covenant of that import, would have been a covenant of works by which the reward would have been reckoned not of grace, but of debt: a covenant of that legal import, would have made the free and abſolute promiſe to Abraham, of no effect. *But*, ſays the apoſtle, *the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Chriſt, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it ſhould make the promiſe of no effect.* The promiſe of the land of Canaan to the Iſraelites and the promiſe of eternal life, are alike in this reſpect; that both are abſolutely free and unconditional,

Gen. xv. 18. *The Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land* No condition is mentioned to be performed either by Abram, or by his seed. The Israelites were to come to the enjoyment of the land of Canaan by the same means, by which a poor sinner comes to the enjoyment of eternal life, that is, by believlieving the promise of God in Christ, or accepting heartily of his free gift. Hence the unbelief of many of the Israelites hindered them from seeing the good land, Heb. iii. 19. *We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

With respect then, to the land of Canaan, what may we suppose to have been the exercise of a believing Israelite in the covenanting at Horeb? He would, in the first place, believe, on the single ground of the divine promise, that the Lord would not fail to put his people in possession of the good land; and then he would say, Since the Lord is my God, a promising and promise-performing God, I profess my faith in him, and avow my desire and resolution, in the strength of his promise, to express my gratitude and thankfulness to my God and Redeemer by a chearful obedience to all his commands. Such is the import of the exercise of which Moses said to the Israelites, *Ye have avouched the Lord to be your God, to walk in his ways.*

Nor is it any real objection to this view of Israel's covenanting, that the outward dispensations of Providence toward them, were according to the regard they had to their covenant with the Lord; that they were to eat the good of the land, if they were willing and obedient; and that, if they were otherwise, the Lord would send a sword to avenge the quarrel of his covenant. We are, by no means, to think, because the Lord chastises his people for their disobedience by depriving them of worldly, or even of spiritual comforts, that

their obedience is the condition or tenure on which they enjoy theſe comforts. The ſuppoſition is contrary to the nature of the everlaſting covenant; by which believers receive all the bleſſings of time and eternity, as the gift of free and ſovereign grace: nor can any work they do, or any quality they poſſeſs, add in the leaſt degree, to the right which the great and precious promiſes of the covenant, give them to thoſe bleſſings. This was the caſe under the Old Teſtament no leſs than under the New. Moſes aſſures us that it was ſo with regard to the grant of the land of Canaan to the Iſraelites, Deut. ix. 3. *Not for thy righteouſneſs, nor for the uprightneſs of thine heart, doſt thou go in to poſſeſs the land: but for the wickedneſs of theſe nations* THE LORD THY GOD *doth drive them out from before thee; and that he may perform the word which the Lord ſware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob.* The Lord dealt with the people of theſe nations as moral agents according to the demerit of their crimes; but he dealt with the Iſraelites as church-members according to the gracious promiſes of the everlaſting covenant.

WITH regard, indeed, to the time and the manner in which he is to beſtow the ſpiritual or temporal bleſſings he hath promiſed, we muſt acknowledge that he hath reſerved them in his own hand. One thing, however, is clear, that the eſtabliſhed ORDER of the covenant for the accompliſhment of the promiſes is ſuch as tends moſt eminently, to ſhew forth the glory of God's wiſdom, power, holineſs, mercy and faithfulneſs. Hence that beautiful order requires, that ſpiritual comforts, not excluding thoſe of our outward lot, ſhould attend a diligent courſe of obedience, and that the witholding of ſuch comforts ſhould correct the children of God for their iniquity. The promiſe of the covenant in Pſalm lxxxix. 30. 31, 32. belongs to the new as well as to the old diſ-

penſation: *If his children forſake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break not my ſtatutes, and keep not my commandments*; *then will I viſit their tranſgreſſions with the rod, and their iniquity with ſtripes.* This order is viſible to an attentive obſerver in the Lord's dealings toward every body of profeſſing Chriſtians. Several of the promiſes and the threatenings in the epiſtles to the ſeven churches of Aſia as plainly reſpected their outward church-ſtate, as ever any promiſes or any threatenings, did that of Iſrael. Indeed it muſt be acknowledged, that in the Lord's providential conduct toward particular churches, *clouds and darkneſs are* often *round about him.* But under what diſpenſation did he fail to exerciſe the faith and patience of his people by ſuch providential conduct? It has freqently been the language of the church, both under the old and new teſtament, *Verily, thou art a God that hideſt thyſelf, O God of Iſrael the Saviour.*

THOUGH the circumſtance of the Iſraelites lifting up their hands and formally ſwearing is not mentioned in the account of this tranſaction, yet their Covenanting is called their *entering into the Lord's oath*, Deut. xxix. 12. Accordingly they afterward uſed that form in the renewing of their covenant.

We only obſerve farther with reſpect to this tranſaction, that it makes an æra in the hiſtory of the church of Iſrael, not leſs remarkable than that of the giving of the promiſe to Abraham. As the latter was the *Magna Charta*, the great charter of all their privileges; ſo the former was always afterward the *Jus et Norma*, the ſtandard and example of all their profeſſions of faith and obedience.

How the Israelites renewed their Covenant.

SO great was the stubbornness of the Israelites, and so frequent the relapses of that people into idolatry, that their history is a continued display of man's depraved nature. Here we may see, as in a glass, that the best outward means and the purest dispensation of ordinances are, in themselves, utterly insufficient to make us turn or cleave to the Lord; and that we, every moment, stand in absolute need of his grace and Spirit to uphold us. Here, too, we often see him interposing in amazing sovereignty, to stop a course of backsliding among his people, and to make them return to himself in the most explicit manner, according to his command, Deut. vi. 13. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.* Chap. x. 20. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God: him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.* We need not scruple to understand this *swearing* of a public declaration, upon oath, of their adherence to the Lord, since the connection and the manifest intention of these precepts, lead us to such an interpretation; since the phrase is used to denote a character of his professing people, by which they were distinguished from the rest of the world, Zeph. i. 4, 5. *I will cut off them that—— swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham*, that is, both professors and profane; and, especially, since the meaning of the precept is delineated in the approved example of the Old Testament church.

WHEN Moses delivered that perswasive repetition of the law which we have in the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites entered anew into their

covenant with the Lord, Chap. xxix. 1. *Theſe are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moſes to make with the children of Iſrael in the land of Moab, beſide the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.* This example of the Iſraelites renewing their covenant in obedience to the Lord's immediate command, was for the imitation of the church till the end of time; that command being a divine warrant for the exerciſe of renewing covenant with the Lord; a divine warrant, not only to the Iſraelites, but to the church of Chriſt in after-times; ſince the duty, as hath been ſhewn, is of ſuch a nature, that it is equally competent to the church under the old Teſtament and under the New. It was, no doubt, peculiarly proper for the Iſraelites to ſet about the renovation of their covenant at this time. It was a ſuitable concluſion to the miniſtry of Moſes. It was a ſuitable preparation for their entrance into the promiſed land.

THESE two eminent chiefs of Iſrael, he who brought them out of Egypt, and he who brought them into Canaan, chiefs whoſe ruling paſſion, next to the love of God, was the love of their people, were both deſirous, before they left the earthly houſe of this tabernacle, to ſee thoſe over whom they had exerciſed ſo much fatherly care, renew their covenant with the Lord; expecting, no doubt, among other precious fruits which, through the Lord's bleſſing, would attend this exerciſe, that it would be a mean of eſtabliſhing the the Iſraelites in the way of the Lord.

Grown old, and ready to drop, like a ſhock of corn, Joſhua gathered all the tribes of Iſrael to Shechem, and called for the elders of Iſrael, and and for their judges, and for their officers; and they preſented themſelves before God, Joſh. xxiv. *On that day*, it is ſaid, *Joſhua made a covenant with the people, and ſet them an ordinance in She-*

chem. Beſides what we took notice of before in this tranſaction, the two following things are remarkable. The firſt is, an accommodation of their engagement to preſent circumſtances. In their covenanting at Sinai, they acknowledged the Lord who brought them out of the land of Egypt and out of the houſe of bondage; but now they acknowledge him as the Lord who *drave out from before them all the people, even the Amorites who dwelt in the land.* The other thing is, that they were in great danger of miſcarrying in the duty, from ſelf-confidence, and from ignorance of the plague of their own heart. Hence Joſhua *ſaid unto the people, Ye cannot ſerve the Lord; he is a holy God: he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your tranſgreſſion, nor your ſins.* We ſhould never ſet about the performance of any duty without a heart-affecting remembrance of God's infinite holineſs and of his infinite indignation againſt ſin; a remembrance tending, through the efficacy of the Holy Ghoſt, to produce a frame of mind equally oppoſite to the deceit of the heart harbouring or diſguiſing ſome beloved idol, and to the legality of the heart diſpoſing us to lean on our own righteouſneſs or on our own ſtrength. That many of the Iſraelites then attained ſuch a ſuitable frame of mind, is highly probable from the happy conſequences of this tranſaction: for it is written, *Iſrael ſerved the Lord all the days of Joſhua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joſhua, and that had known all the works of the Lord, which he had done for Iſrael.*

ESSAY III.

How the Iſraelites renewed their covenant under their Kings.

THE whole Jewiſh commonwealth was formed with the greateſt ſubſerviency to the good of the church. Their kings, their judges, the heads of their tribes were obliged by their connection with the church, to regard her welfare in the adminiſtration of the ſtate. David and ſeveral others were very uſeful to the church in two reſpects; the one peculiar to the Old Teſtament diſpenſation, the other may have place under the new alſo.

FIRST, Some of their kings and judges were uſeful in a way peculiar to the time of the Old Teſtament; in regard that they were not only magiſtrates in the ſtate; but they were in the church, prophets, inſpired writers, and types of Chriſt; ſuch were Moſes, Samuel, David. Hence it is of importance to diſtinguiſh what is recorded of them in the one character, from what is recorded of them in the other. When Samuel anointed David to be king of Iſrael, he acted not as a political ruler, but as a prophet having an extraordinary commiſſion from the head of the church for that purpoſe. The covenant of royalty was made with David not as a civil magiſtrate merely, but as a church-member and one of the moſt eminent types of Chriſt *.

* PERHAPS it may be queſtioned, whether all the kings of Iſrael were, properly, types of Chriſt. The princes, indeed, of David's line were types of Chriſt in reſpect of the covenant of royalty: but how does it appear that this circumſtance had any effect toward either the increaſe or diminution of the kingly power? We beg leave to repeat a truth which ſeems to have been little attended to; which is, That the circumſtance of perſons, places or things being types of Chriſt, neither aroſe from, nor affected the intrinſic nature of ſuch perſons, places or things; it was only a certain conſideration of them for the

SECONDLY, Several of their kings and judges were useful to the church in a way in which all magistrates who have an opportunity of being themselves church-members, ought to be useful to her. Thus David assisted at bringing the ark from Kirjath-jearim; Solomon built the temple; Hezekiah and Josiah stirred up the people to reformation, and appointed the passover to be kept. We add (what is the subject of the following observations) that several of them used their influence and authority in exciting their subjects to renew their covenant with the Lord.

LET us consider how the church of Israel went about this duty in the reign of Asa, 2 Chron. xv. The people were stirred up and encouraged to it by a message from the Lord. *And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin, the Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. Be ye strong, therefore, and let not not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded.* In compliance with so seasonable an exhortation, various pieces of reformation were begun and carried on. *When Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from Mount Ephraim,*

use of the church, without which it had no existence. Hence considering the Jewish state abstractly, one may say. There were no types of Christ in it at all. The typical consideration of the kings was equally different from the civil consideration of them, as the ceremonial was from the judicial law.

and renewed the altar of the Lord that was before the porch of the Lord. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the ſtrangers with them out of Ephraim and Manaſſeh, and out of Simeon. The influence which Aſa here uſed in making the people concur in the work of God, was not a mere exertion of his civil authority which did not extend to the ſtrangers out of Ephraim and Manaſſeh, and out of Simeon; it ſeems to have been much more the influence of his example and exhortations. Hence their concurrence is deſcribed as in the higheſt degree, voluntary and cheerful: *So they gathered themſelves together at Jeruſalem. And they offered unto the Lord in that day, of the ſpoil which they had brought, ſeven hundred oxen and ſeven thouſand ſheep.* They ſet about Covennanting as a mean of confirming and eſtabliſhing the degree of reformation they had attained, and as a mean of advancing and carrying it forward: *They entered into a covenant to ſeek the Lord God of their fathers;* relying on the promiſes made to their fathers, and recogniſing the engagements of their fathers; in both which reſpects he might be called *the God of their fathers*; for as the Lord had ſhewn by his promiſe that he was not aſhamed to be called their God; ſo in their covenant of duty they were not aſhamed to avouch openly, that the Lord was their God.

We may obſerve an accommodation of their engagements to the circumſtances of the church at that time. The ten tribes had fallen into idolatry in worſhipping the calves that Jeroboam had ſet up at Dan and Bethel; and therefore the followers of the true God profeſs their ſtedfaſt adherence to his law concerning the puniſhment of idolators in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy; engaging, *that whoſoever would not ſeek the Lord God of Iſrael, ſhould be put to death, whether ſmall or great, whether man or woman.* They did not think it enough to covenant, that they would ob-

ſerve the law of Moſes in general; but they pointed out that precept, which was then moſt remarkably tranſgreſſed, as a precept to which in a particular manner, they vowed adherence. The manner in which the Iſraelites were led forward to covenanting, and the happy effects of it, ſhould powerfully recommend the duty to our ſerious regard: *They ſware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had ſworn with all their heart, and ſought him with the whole deſire; and he was found of them: And the Lord gave them reſt round about.* On the whole, it is plain that the ſeveral circumſtances we have taken notice of in this piece of ſacred hiſtory; ſuch as, complying with the calls of word and providence; beginning reformation; engaging to carry it on when begun; avowing an adherence to particular precepts of God's law in oppoſition to particular prevailing evils; binding themſelves by oath to be the Lord's; performing religious duties cheerfully and with the whole heart; all theſe are for our imitation, being plainly of a moral nature, and as compatible with the New as with the Old Teſtament diſpenſation.

THE next inſtance that occurs, of the Iſraelites renewing their covenant with the Lord, was at the coronation of Jehoaſh the ſon of Ahaziah. 2 Kings xi. 17. *And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people: between the king and the people. And all the people of the land went into the houſe of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces throughly, and ſlew Mattan the prieſt of Baal before the altar: and the prieſt appointed officers over the houſe of the Lord.*

A GOOD church-member will always be a good citizen. Hence our meaſures for the better ſecurity of our property and political freedom will not

not the leſs but the more effectual for being attended with ſuitable endeavours for the reformation of the church. Jehoida, as became a true lover of his country, had been very inſtrumental in bringing about that happy revolution by which the people were delivered from the tyranny of Athaliah. And as became an office-bearer in the houſe of God, he ſet about the reformation of the church, encouraging the people to renew their covenant with the Lord. Jehoiada, in the firſt place, made a covenant between the Lord the head of the church on the one ſide, and the king with the people, one the other. It is plain, that the king and the people were in this tranſaction, conſidered as church-members: for they covenanted to be the Lord's people, that is, *the Lord's peculiar treaſure, a kingdom of prieſts, an holy nation:* There never was, nor ever ſhall be a ſociety to which theſe characters belong, unleſs it is one founded on the covenant of grace: But the ſociety that ſtands alone upon this foundation is the church. Hence it was only in virtue of the prieſthood, and of that miniſterial authority which the Lord grants to ſome for the edification of the church, that Jehoiada could adminiſter this covenant.

Besides this religious covenant, a political one between the ſovereign and the ſubject is diſtinctly mentioned: a circumſtance which intimates that the former was not regarded in a political, but in a ſpiritual light.

The havoc which the people made of Baal's trumpery, and the ſlaughter of his prieſts, ſhew us what particular public evil their covenant with the Lord had been expreſly levelled againſt.

Sometimes, when divine providence is bringing a people, at once, both to a purer profeſſion of the true religion, and to the enjoyment of civil liberty, an individual, like Mr Calvin of Geneva,

or like the great Guſtavus, the deliverer of Sweden, is honoured with great authority and with great uſefulneſs both in the church and in the ſtate. As a patriot, Jehoiada rids his country of a tyrant, gives the crown to the rightful heir, and and adminiſters an oath obliging both king and ſubject to the duties, they mutually owe one another. As a prieſt, he carries on the reformation of the church, ſtirs up her members to renew their covenant with the Lord, and appoints officers over the houſe of the Lord. However, it was ſeldom, only indeed on ſudden emergencies or in very difficult ſituations, that a prieſt had occaſion to act in a political capacity. It does not appear, that it was lawful for any of the tribe of Levi, *which the Lord had ſeparated to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to ſtand before the Lord to miniſter unto him, and to bleſs in his name*, more than it is lawful for miniſters of the Goſpel, under the New Teſtament diſpenſation, to entangle themſelves unneceſſarily in the affairs of this life, or to bear any ordinary ſtated office or employment of a political nature.

WE have another inſtance of covenanting in Hezekiah's time. 2 Chron. xxix. 4——15. *He brought in the prieſts, and the Levites, and gathered them together into the eaſt ſtreet, and ſaid unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, ſanctify now yourſelves, and ſanctify the houſe of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthineſs out of the holy place. For our fathers have treſpaſſed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, and have forſaken him.——Wherefore the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah and Jeruſalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble.———Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Iſrael, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. My ſons, be not now negligent: for the Lord hath choſen you to ſtand before him, to ſerve him, and that*

you ſhould miniſter to him and burn incenſe. Then the Levites aroſe——and they gathered their brethren, and ſanctified themſelves, and came according to the commandment of the king by the word of the Lord, to cleanſe the houſe of the Lord

WHILE Hezekiah is exhorting the prieſts and Levites to ſet about the reformation of the church, he declares that, for his part, *it was in his heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Iſrael.* The active part that Hezekiah and Joſiah took in carrying on covenanting work, leads us to enquire, what is meant by the kings of Judah appointing, or cauſing particular ordinances of the church to be obſerved.

PROBABLY it will throw much light on the ſubject, to obſerve, that theſe kings acted not merely as political rulers, but likewiſe as church-members, and ſome of them as under the immediate influence of the Spirit of prophecy.

As church-members, they might ſtir up the office-bearers of the church by an holy example, by admonitions, by reproofs. What ſhould hinder Hezekiah conſidered as a church-member of eminent gifts and graces, from addreſſing the prieſts and Levites in theſe words, *My ſons, be not now negligent, for the Lord hath choſen you?* What ſhould hinder him, in the ſame honourable character, from declaring, that, for his part, it was now in his heart, that he ſhould no longer neglect the duty of public covenanting, but along with any that choſe to join with him, ſhould ſet about it without any delay? In this character, too, Jehoſhaphat, fearing a threatened calamity, and ſetting himſelf to ſeek the Lord, might ſtir up fellow church-members to faſting and humiliation, pointing out the calls of word and providence to that exerciſe.

As bearing, in ſome inſtances, the extraordinary character of prophets, they might deliver to

the church an immediate meſſage from God, and enjoin what they delivered by divine authority. Solomon, undoubtedly, acted as a prophet in his dedication of the temple. Nor have we any reaſon to doubt that it was under the infallible guidance of inſpiration, that Jehoſhaphat poured forth that remarkable prayer, 2 Chron. xx. 6,——13. Hezekiah, too, ſeems to have ſpoken here to the prieſts and Levites, as he was *moved by the Holy Ghoſt*. Hence this *commandment of the king* is ſaid to be *by the words of the Lord*. Now, the ſtate, as ſuch, has nothing to do with this character: it belongs to the church, 1 Corinth. xii. 28. *God ſet ſome in the church—prophets.*

FARTHER, the kingly authority was in Judah (what indeed it ought to be in every nation under heaven, where the Lord hath erected a viſible church for himſelf) ſubſervient to the good of the church, as far as two diſtinct, independent powers in friendly alliance, may, conſiſtently with their independence, be ſubſervient to one another*: hence the kingly authority in Judah might do much to forward the duty of covenanting. The

* IT is not meant, that every civil power ſhould, like the firſt Chriſtian emperor of Rome, heap worldly riches and honours upon eccleſiaſtical officers; or that the clergy, as in Popiſh countries, ſhould be exempted from the juriſdiction of civil courts of judicature, or from bearing equally with their fellow-ſubjects the burdens of the civil government: and leaſt of all is it meant, that the magiſtrate ſhould yield to them, or allow them to poſſeſs, any power or authority whatſoever over the bodies, the liberty or the property of men. But we hold it to be the duty of the magiſtrate to labour, all he can, to promote the purity of goſpel-ordinances, and ſecure to church-members the undiſturbed and peaceable enjoyment of them. If the ſpiritual nature of the church were duly attended to, one ſhould think, there might be a more ſincere and permanent amity, and a more conſtant intercourſe of friendly offices between the church and a particular ſtate, than ever can have place between two independent civil powers; becauſe the ſame individuals may, at the ſame time, be good members both of the church and of the ſtate; and becauſe while the church, paying no regard to worldly wealth, power and preferment, keeps up the character of a truly ſpiritual ſociety, there can be no rivalſhip between her and a civil ſtate.

king might iſſue proclamations, in which, as a church-member ſollicitous for the reformation of religion, he might communicate his ſentiments and counſel on that ſubject, to fellow church-members. It ſeems difficult to prove that there was any thing more than this, in Jehoſhaphat's proclamation of a faſt. By the giving or the withholding of ſuch favours as are not due to any individuals on the ſingle conſideration of their being members of the ſtate, by that influence which the ſplendor of royalty has over mankind, and which makes the example or inſtructions of a king be univerſally regarded, he may, humanly ſpeaking, do more than other church-members, to engage his people in the practice of any particular duty ſuch as Covenanting. This, and not the application of outward force and violence, ſeems to be meant by Joſiah's *cauſing all that were preſent in Jeruſalem and Benjamin, to ſtand to the covenant.* As it is, in the nature of things, one of the groſſeſt abſurdities to ſpeak of forcing perſons to be church-members, it was never lawful, either under the Old or under the New Teſtament, to enjoin public Covenanting, an ordinance of the church, under civil penalties.

WITH regard to this inſtance of Covenanting, we may obſerve that Hezekiah wanted the Iſraelites to ſet about it in the way of acknowledging,

IT muſt be acknowledged indeed, that conſidering, on the one hand, the exorbitant incroachments of the Romiſh church on the civil powers of Europe; and conſidering, on the other hand, that our old reformers, who held the magiſtrate to be *Cuſtos utriuſque tabulæ quod attinet ad externum*, the guardian, with reſpect to external order, of the firſt as well as of the ſecond table of the law, ſeem to have ſometimes allowed the Proteſtant princes too much power of modelling the diſcipline and government of the church at pleaſure; on theſe accounts, it is neceſſary that church and ſtate ſhould be conſtantly watching againſt the incroachments of each on the other; and that, in all their proceedings with regard to one another, they ſhould be careful to keep within the ſphere of duty marked out for them ſeverally in the word.

not only their own sin, but likewise the sin of their fathers, *Our fathers have trespassed.* The people of God ought to do so, in opposition to the men of the world, who, instead of making any such acknowledgment, think themselves authorized by custom and prescription, to do whatever their fathers were wont to do, and to hand down to posterity as well the vices as the virtues which they have received from their predecessors.

FARTHER, Hezekiah meant that this Covenanting should have a reference to what was then the present situation of the Israelites. They were under particular tokens of the divine displeasure: *Therefore,* says Hezekiah, *it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us.* In the words *with the Lord God of Israel,* he intimates that he meant to recognise his own and his people's covenant-relation to the Lord. No exercise could be more proper amidst the awful signs of God's wrath.

THE last of the kings of Judah in whose reign the Lord's covenant is recorded to have been solemnly renewed, is Josiah, 2 Kings xxiii. *And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and prophets, and all the people both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, to perform the words of this covenant, that were written in this book, and and all the people stood to the covenant.* 2 Chron. xxxiv. *Then the king sent, and gathered together all the elders of Judah, and Jerusalem. And the king*

went up into the houſe of the Lord, and all the men of Judah amd the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and the prieſts, and the Levites, and all the people both ſmall and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the houſe of the Lord. And the king ſtood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his ſtatutes with all his heart and with all his ſoul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. And he cauſed all that were preſent in Jeruſalem and Benjamin to ſtand. And the inhabitants of Jeruſalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

At this time, the call to the duty of covenanting was very urgent. The grounds of the Lord's controverſy with the land had been greatly increaſed by the wickedneſs of the preceding reign. The Lord had put it into the heart of Joſiah to attempt a national reformation. Several Providential circumſtances concurred to favour his deſign: ſuch as, Hilkiah's finding a copy of the law of the Lord; the king's alarming apprehenſions from the peruſal of it; the meſſage of Huldah the propheteſs from the Lord to Joſiah. When *the ſet time* for the revival of true religion is come, it is inſtructive to obſerve how a variety of occurrences, and the deſigns of men whoſe views are the fartheſt imaginable from any ſuch thing, conſpire to haſten that revival. Here is much of God to be ſeen.

On this occaſion, the young prince is all activity. Having aſſembled the people, he uſes the ſame means to awaken them to a ſenſe of their ſin and danger, whereby he had himſelf been awakened: he reads the law of the Lord to them. And then ſtanding conſpicuous amidſt the congregation, he is the firſt to enter into covenant with the

Lord, inviting his people to come into the ſame ſacred engagement.

WHATEVER influence the king uſed, we muſt not conclude, that the people were compelled by civil pains, to enter into the covenant. We have no reaſon to doubt, that Joſiah well underſtood that Covenanting was a mere farce, and by no means the duty which the Lord requires, unleſs it was altogether voluntary.

JOSIAH was, indeed, young and unexperienced: he knew and loved the Lord; and the ardour of his zeal might carry him farther than a phlegmatic caſuiſt, coolly pondering the matter in his cloſet, would allow to be prudent. On the other hand, we juſtly ſuſpect, that the bulk of the people went into the covenant to gratify their king and in compliance with the times. Wherefore they are charged with groſs hypocriſy in this matter. Jerem. iii. 10. *Yet for all this her treacherous ſiſter Judah hath not turned unto me with the whole heart, but feignedly, ſaith the Lord.* On this account, it is not ſaid of the covenanters in Joſiah's time, as of thoſe in the time of Aſa, that *they entered into the covenant with all their heart and with all their ſoul.* And probably for the ſame reaſon, it is ſaid of the former, but not of the latter, that *the king cauſed them to ſtand; and that he made them ſerve the Lord their God.*

THESE words, *To walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his teſtimonies and his ſtatutes with all the heart and with all the ſoul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book*, ſeem to have been a part of the inſtrument, or form of the oath into which the people entered; as we have them both in the book of kings and in the book of chronicles without any other variation than this; that the words, *with all the heart and with all the ſoul*, are mentioned in the one as the words of the king,

and in the other as the words of the people along with him.

THE univerſality of the obedience here promiſed, is intimated in the various terms, *commandments*, *teſtimonies*, *ſtatutes*: the ſincerity of the dedication that they here make of themſelves, is declared in the expreſſions, *with all the heart and with all the ſoul*. Thus we ſee, this covenant was framed in direct oppoſition to the evaſions of hypocriſy which then prevailed among the Iſraelites.

THE covenant that the church entered into at this time, was not abſolutely a new covenant: it was the covenant *of the God of their fathers*; it was therefore a renovation of the Lord's covenant.

OUR Lord takes care to preſerve the purity of his ordinances, even when, comparatively, little divine efficacy ſeems to attend them, and few reap ſpiritual and ſaving profit by them *. That was probably much the caſe with the covenanting in Joſiah's time. Upon the death of that amiable prince, the bloſſoms of public reformation ſoon diſappeared, and hardly any good fruits of their covenanting were to be found. Like the dog returning to his vomit, they returned to the old courſe of ſinning, and perſiſted obſtinately in it; till the fierceneſs of the Lord's anger brought on the ruin of their city and their temple, and the captivity of their nation for ſeventy years.

* A CONSIDERATION both alarming and comfortable: alarming, when we conſider how many abuſe ordinances to the ſoftering of their pride, of their legality and ſecurity: but comfortable, when we reflect, that the benefit of ſuch purity is not confined to the preſent time, but extends to poſterity, and is very uſeful to the church in the obſervation of the ſame ordinances in all after ages.

Of the Public Covenanting in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

DURING the Babyloniſh captivity, the Lord continued to take care of the Iſraelites as his church. He ſoftened the rigour of their exile by his word and Spirit, by the miniſtry of the prophets, and by the hopes of a return to their native country. He dealt well with them according to his word; *Thou ſhalt go to Babylon, there ſhalt thou be delivered: there the Lord ſhall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*

BEFORE the captivity, the hopes of the reformation of the Iſraelites were utterly loſt; in regard that their obſtinate apoſtacy from the Lord was ſo great and ſo general; and in regard that the faithful few could not have a church communion ſeparated from that of a corrupt majority, the adminiſtration of their public ordinances being appropriated, by a poſitive command of God, to one place, and to the prieſthood of one family. But after the captivity, the ſame people, purified in the furnace of affliction, were encouraged by their prophets, particularly by Haggai and Zechariah, to ſet about a public reformation: Accordingly, the princes, the prieſts, all ranks of men concurring cheerfully in the good work, the conformity of the church to the divine rule was, in this period, carried much farther than it had been even under the beſt of their kings.

WE cannot forbear taking notice of an inſtance that ſhews how far theſe reformers were freed from a ſlaviſh regard to cuſtom; an attachment, which is commonly a great bar to reformation. The inſtance is recorded in Nehem. 13, 14, 15. *They found it written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moſes, that the children of*

Iſrael ſhould dwell in booths in the feaſt of the ſeventh month, or of tabernacles. Now that appointment had been overlooked from the days of Joſhuah the ſon of Nun to that day. But the reformers in Nehemiah's time, convinced that it was their duty to ſupply the defects, as well as to perſerve the attainments of their fathers, found themſelves ſhut up to conform their practice to God's word alone, and to keep the feaſt of tabernacles in booths. As this was a public evidence of their ſingle regard to the authority and honour of God, ſo it was accompanied with much comfort: for *there was very great gladneſs*.

Hence we may learn, that we ſhould not be diſcouraged from the practice of public Covenanting, becauſe it has been much neglected, and few examples of it occur in the hiſtory of the church ſince the coming of Chriſt. Here we ſee the Iſraelites going forward in the performance of a duty for which they had not the ſhadow of a precedent for nearly a thouſand years back. We ſhould readily embrace an opportunity of this kind to ſhew the ſingleneſs of our regard to the rule of God's word.

But to come to our purpoſe, we ſhall proceed to conſider the examples of Covenanting in this memorable period of reformation.

The firſt paſſage we take notice of, is in Ezra x. 2, 3, 4, 5. *And Shecaniah the ſon of Jehiel, one of the ſons of Elam anſwered and ſaid unto Ezra, We have treſpaſſed againſt our God, and have taken ſtrange wives of the people of the land; yet now there is hope in Iſrael concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God, to put away all the wives, and ſuch as are born of them according to the counſel of my Lord, and of thoſe that tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to law. Ariſe: for the matter belongeth to thee; we alſo will be with thee: be of good cou-*

rage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel to swear, they would do according to this word: and they sware.

PUBLIC Covenanting, we have said, is always to be gone about with an express reference to some particular point of truth or duty, of sin or error, concerning which our present circumstances call us to bear testimony: so the covenanting here, is pointed against the unlawful marriages of the Israelites with the people of the land, and mingling the holy seed with strangers. If people are heartily resolved on the extirpation of any particular evil, they will not be backward to join in covenanting against it. We have reason to fear that much of the opposition which persons make to this ordinance, proceeds from the deceitfulness of the heart, which still retains, perhaps unnoticed, a secret hankering after some evil or another, of which, in covenanting, they would have to make a solemn renunciation.

CHURCH-MEMBERS ought to embrace the opportunities that offer, of stirring up and encouraging the officers of the church to the duties of their station. The Colossians are exhorted to say to Archippus, *Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it.* Shecaniah here, sets us an example of this duty. Shecaniah was a chief of the fathers, Ezra viii. 3. an eminent member of the commonwealth, and as we may conclude from what is here recorded of him, a most valuable member of the church. Having shewn Ezra that the proper course in their situation was, to make a covenant with the Lord as their God, he adds that Ezra ought to exert himself in that matter, as the management of it, belonged, in a special manner, to him: for Covenanting being an ordinance of the church, it lay upon him as an office-bearer of the church, a

prieſt and ſcribe, to point out to the people the preſent call to that duty, to give them an opportunity of joining in it, and to preſide in the adminiſtration of it.

It is agreeable to obſerve how church and ſtate concurred, at this time, in carrying on the work of God. *They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jeruſalem, unto all the children of the captivity, that they ſhould gather themſelves together unto Jeruſalem; and that whoſoever would not come within three days, according to the counſel of the princes and the elders, all his ſubſtance ſhould be forfeited, and himſelf ſeparated from the congregation of thoſe that had been carried away.* As the regulation of marriages was a part of the civil police, ſo it was proper enough for the princes and elders to command the attendance of the people at Jeruſalem, in order to an inquiry, who had, or had not taken ſtrange wives. Nor can their right of annexing the penalty of the confiſcation of goods to ſo reaſonable a command, be disputed. The civil penalty, according to the obvious meaning of the words, was not intended againſt refuſing to ſwear the covenant, but againſt wilful abſence from the aſſembly of the people at Jeruſalem.

Besides, it was plainly the duty of eccleſiaſtical office-bearers to excommunicate all open enemies and deſpiſers of the reformation, which was now begun; and all might juſtly be accounted ſuch who diſregarded the command of the princes and elders. Hence the proclamation bore, that whoſoever did not come within three days, according to the counſel of the princes and the elders, was to incur not only the forfeiture of his goods, but likewiſe excommunication. It was the ſame crime that was to be puniſhed as prejudicial to the ſtate, and cenſured as a ſcandal to the church.

The next paſſage is in Nehem. ix. 38. and x. 1, 28,—31. *And becauſe of all this, we make a ſure*

covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites and prieſts ſeal unto it. Now thoſe that ſealed were Nehemiah, &c. And the reſt of the people, the prieſts, the porters, the ſingers, the Nethinims, *and all they that had ſeparated themſelves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their ſons and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having underſtanding: They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curſe and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moſes the ſervant of God, and to obſerve and do all the commandments of the Lord our God, and his judgments and his ſtatutes: and that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our ſons. And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the ſabbath day to ſell, we would not buy of them on the ſabbath day, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the ſeventh year, and the exaction of every debt.*

A REMEMBRANCE of the covenant at Sinai ſeems to be implied in the mention here made of the Lord's law as given by Moſes; an expreſſion which could hardly fail of bringing to their mind the conſent of their fathers to that law; and the obligation which that conſent brought upon their poſterity.

IT is probable, too, that they were not unmindful of the engagements, which, by the counſel of Ezra, they had entered into about ten or twelve years before. Indeed, ſome reference to it ſeems to be intimated in their promiſe, *that they would not give their daughters to the people of the land, nor take the daughters of thoſe people to their ſons.*

THEY covenanted not only againſt preſent, but alſo againſt former evils. You aſk, how they did ſo? They acknowledged the ſins of their fathers, they expreſſed their ſorrow for them, they promiſed, thro' grace, to forſake them. *Becauſe of all*

this, say they, on account of all the particular evils and circumstances we have mentioned, *we make a sure covenant, and write it.*

FARTHER, they engaged, in the most explicit manner, to those duties which were peculiarly suitable to their circumstances at that time. Hence they entered into an oath that they would not marry with the people of the land; that they would not buy on the sabbath, the wares or victuals which the people of the land might bring to them on that holy day; that they would leave the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. Why are these things specified? Are they greater evils in themselves than other transgressions of God's law which are not mentioned here? By no means; but they were evils which prevailed at that time; evils into which the children of Israel had already fallen, and were in danger of relapsing. It appears indeed, from all the preceding instances of Covenanting, that there is hardly any thing that so uniformly characterises it, as an express reference to some truth or duty, in adhering to which we are likely from our present circumstances, to meet with the greatest opposition.

THE leading men of the State having subscribed the covenant, the people followed their example; *they clave to their brethren*; an expression which intimates the particular tendency of this duty to unite church-members in the matter about which they covenant. For it is only in the way of *giving them one heart and one way* according to the promise, Jerem. xxxii. 39. that the Lord ever brings them to yield themselves to him in covenanting.

BEFORE we leave this passage, we should observe, who were admitted into this covenant: we say, admitted into it; for we have no ground to believe that any were *forced* into it. In the first place, they were persons of all the different ranks

in ſociety; princes, prieſts, Levites, porters, Nethinims. Hence the people of Iſrael may be ſaid to have been properly repreſented in this tranſaction. In the ſecond place, they were perſons that made a credible profeſſion as church-members. They were ſuch as had *ſparated themſelves from the people of the land unto the law of God; every one having knowledge and having underſtanding.* We know not a juſter account than this, of the qualifications neceſſary in church-members.

Of the Uſe which we ought to make of the Old Teſtament.

SOME will aſk, To what purpoſe is the ſurvey we have taken of the various inſtances of Covenanting under the old Teſtament? Has not the old Teſtament or Covenant given place to the new? Has not Chriſt plainly declared in the new Teſtament what ordinances he will have his church obſerve? Why then look ſo much into the old, for the warrants of a duty of the new Teſtament-church?

To all declamation of this kind, which we are daily hearing from the enemies of covenanting, we offer the following reply.

THE old Teſtament is a neceſſary part of that written word which we are commanded to ſearch, and which *makes us wiſe unto ſalvation, being profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and inſtruction in righteouſneſs.* No one, therefore, is to be blamed for having regard to the Old Teſtament as the rule of their duty.

IT is true, many things that were practiſed by the antient Iſraelites, are now no more incumbent on church-members. Yet even theſe things are ſtill to be attended to, and received as the word

of God. We ought to acquiesce in the connection which the Lord appointed between the circumstances of the church under the Old Testament and the observation of the ceremonial law, as well as in the connection between our own circumstances and our partaking of Baptism and the Lord's supper. The submission of the heart to God's authority in his law is one thing; the expressing of that submission in our outward actions, is another thing. The former ought to be constant and invariable, extending also to the whole of God's law, Psal. cxix. 128. *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right.* The latter is of necessity occasional and partial, as circumstances require and opportunities occur. We are to reverence the Lord's authority as it was interposed in the ceremonial institutions, though we have no occasion, like the antient Jews, to put them in practice. Besides, our faith and love, our esteem and veneration should be exercised with respect to whatever the Lord reveals, of his conduct toward the church, the one body of which every Christian is a member. We ought to observe with holy admiration, how the building of mercy began, and how it gradually advanced. Some regulations were observed in the first stages of the building, which afterward became unnecessary; but the greater and more important part of them is continued from the beginning to the end. The whole is eminently the work of infinite mercy, power, wisdom and faithfulness, Psal. lxxxix. 2. *Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.* If we have a higher station in that building, than the old Testament saints had, we are by no means to despise their inferior station: to which indeed, according to the appointed order of the building, we owe the superior advantages of our own situation. To that purpose is the apostle's caveat, Rom. xi. 18. *Boast not against the branches: but if thou boast,*

thou beareſt not the root, but the root thee. Nor ſhould it be here forgotten, that, as we obſerved before, many of the laws of Moſes are ſtill obligatory upon us as to their ſpirit and ultimate deſign, though not as to their form. The ſame holds true of Old Teſtament examples. So that *whatſoever was written afore-time, was written for our learning, that we, through faith and patience of the ſcriptures, might have hope.*

BUT the authority of the Old Teſtament binds us to regard not only the ſpirit, but likewiſe the letter and form of many of its precepts and examples. It will hardly be diſputed, that whatever was the duty of antient Iſrael, is ſo far ſtill the duty of Chriſtians as it had no neceſſary relation to the peculiarities of their church or of their ſtate, or as it may be practiſed by any church or ſtate without impropriety or inconſiſtency with the advantages of the new Teſtament dispenſation. And then we are, by no means, to depart from the letter or form of any precept of God's law, if he has not himſelf given us any intimation that we may depart from it. Hence if the form of a duty is the ſame in the new Teſtament as in the old, we may conclude, that the form as well as the ſpirit of it, is obligatory upon us. Hence, too, if a duty, with reſpect to the ſpirit of it, is plainly enjoined in the new Teſtament, without any change, either expreſſed or implied, of the form or manner in which it was practised under the Old Teſtament, we may ſafely conclude, that with regard to ſuch a duty, we are not allowed to deviate from the form preſcribed by the divine authority of the old Teſtament.

BUT ſome appear to be of opinion that the precepts and examples of of the Old Teſtament repeated or referred to in the New, derive their authority and obligation upon us from that repetition or that reference.

So far is this opinion from being true that, in some respects, the authority of the new Testament rests upon the authority of the old, as its foundation: not that the new is less immediately from God than the old; their origin and intrinsic excellence are equally divine: but with regard to order and connection, the one is to the other, as the higher parts of a building are to the lower. The new Testament continually establishes the authority of the old, and builds upon it. The history of the new Testament answers to the prophecies of the old. As to the doctrines of the new Testament, our Lord and his apostles constantly referred their hearers to the old, affirming that they said *no other things than what Moses and the prophets had said before.* Our Saviour and his apostles proposed many examples to the imitation of their hearers, as obligatory upon them by the authority alone of the old Testament. So our Lord defended the conduct of his disciples in plucking and eating the ears of corn on the sabbath, from the example of David, Matt. xii. 3, 4, 5. So the apostles encourage us to faith, to patience and prayer from the examples of Abraham, of Job and Elias, Rom. iv. Jam. v. 11, 17, 18. The phrase *It is written*, which commonly in the new Testament denotes divine authority, is applied to the history of the old, Gal. iv. 22. Indeed hardly any thing would appear more unreasonable to an impartial reader of the new Testament than to suppose, that, when the penmen of it repeated a precept or referred to an example of the old Testament, they meant to give something a divine authority and obligation, which, otherwise, it would not have had.

For a great part of the first century, the old Testament was all the written word that Christians were in possession of; and yet they were enjoined to take heed to that word, and commended for searching the scriptures daily, 1 Pet. i, 19. Acts

xvii. 11. *The Bereans were more noble than thoſe of Theſſalonica.* But in what reſpect were they noble? in ſetting aſide the authority of the old Teſtament? Quite the reverſe; it conſiſted in manifesting ſo high a regard to the authority of the old Teſtament, that they would not receive even the doctrine of the apoſtles, without examining, whether it was, or was not, agreeable to that divine record. It is plain, therefore, that the firſt Chriſtians ſubjected their hearts and conſciences to the old Teſtament as much as ever the Jews did. And why ſhould not we do the ſame? Were church-members looſed from their obligation to ſubmit to the authority of the old Teſtament as ſoon as all the books of the new Teſtament were publiſhed? By no means. The obligation was conſtituted by God himſelf, and none but he could looſe them from it; and that he never did. Nay, they were more obliged than ever to read and ſtudy the old Teſtament, when the Lord, in the new, had drawn aſide the vail, and had placed the great things of his law in the moſt glorious point of view.

THE authority, therefore, of the old Teſtament being, in itſelf, ſuperiour to objection, we are bound to obey the precepts and to imitate the examples of it, even ſuch of them as we cannot find expreſly repeated in the new Teſtament. So we are obliged by the authority of the old Teſtament, to abſtain from marrying within the prohibited degrees of conſanguinity; to ſwear to the truth when we are called before a lawful magiſtrate; to ſpare the life of one chargeable with accidental manſlaughter; to have the ſeal of the covenant adminiſtered to our children: and yet not one of theſe precepts is to be found expreſly repeated in the New Teſtament. In the ſame manner, the hiſtory of the old Teſtament comprehending a period of nearly four thouſand years, contains a vaſt variety of characters and ſituations unnoticed in

the new Teſtament, which are highly proper for our imitation. We are not more bound to imitate the patience of Job which is mentioned, than the victorious chaſtity of Joſeph and the faithful friendſhip between David and Jonathan, which are not mentioned, in the new Teſtament.

Besides, with reſpect to thoſe ſituations which are common to both the old and new Teſtaments, the duty of the church in ſome of them is much more fully exemplified in the old. The new Teſtament, indeed, gives us ſome account of the public proceedings of the churches planted by the apoſtles, of thoſe in Jeruſalem, in Antioch, in Epheſus: but theſe accounts are very ſhort; it is plain, they were never intended to be the only ſtandard of the duty of God's people in a viſible church-ſtate to the excluſion of the various uſeful examples of their duty in that capacity which the more copious, particular and long-continued hiſtory of the old Teſtament ſupplies. In the new Teſtament, we have hardly any more than a view of a particular church during the ſtay of an apoſtle in it, which was ſometimes but one day, and ſeldom longer than a few weeks: but in the old, we ſee the church of Iſrael paſſing through a great variety of conditions, ſometimes in proſperity ſometimes in adverſity; ſometimes excited to reformation, ſometimes ſeduced to idolatry by the civil magiſtrate or by her own office-bearers; ſometimes lively and zealous in the obſervation of divine ordinances, and ſometimes grown lukewarm, carnal and ſecure. Hence we need not be ſurprized to find ſome duties incumbent on church-members in their joint capacity, more clearly exemplified in the old Teſtament than in the new; ſince in that long ſucceſſion of circumſtances and ſituations which are recorded of the Jewiſh church, we cannot, in reaſon, ſuppoſe but that there muſt have been occaſions for the regular performance of whatſoever the Lord requires of a people in their church-

capacity: But so extensive an exemplication of such duties is not to be expected in the period of about thirty years after our Saviour's ascension; the period to which the history of the new Testament is confined.

ON the whole, nothing is more absurd than attempting to raise our esteem of one part of revelation at the expense of another. A believing submission of heart is due to all that God says. It is undeniable, that we have more of the great and precious promises of the everlasting covenant, and more precepts and examples with respect to the duties of civil and of sacred society, in the old, than we have in the new Testament. The new Testament constantly in all its histories, in its rules and exhortations, in its doctrines and reasonings confirms the authority of the old: So that if a duty is plainly injoined in the old Testament, and is not altered or annulled in the new, we need not scruple to go forward in the practice of such a duty upon the authority alone of the former.

Of the characteristics of the New Testament Dispensation.

"NEW Testament dispensation!" cries one: "ay, our divines are very shy of using the "scripture expression on this subject. It is called "in scripture the new covenant; as much distinct "indeed, from the old as heaven and earth. Do "our divines think they express the thing better "than the Spirit of God, who knew best the fittest words?

THERE is no occasion for such an outcry against our divines, if they mean no more by *the dispensation of the covenant of grace*, than what is frequently meant in scripture by the word *covenant*. All that our divines intend is, A manner of decla-

ring or exhibiting the covenant of grace. Indeed the word which we render *covenant*, is sometimes used to signify that secret eternal transaction among the persons of the Godhead which is called *the council of peace*; as in Psal. lxxxix. 3. *I have made a covenant with my chosen.* Luke xxii 29. *I appoint*, or *covenant, to you as my Father hath appointed, or covenanted, to me, a kingdom.* That appointment of the Father must be understood of of the covenant between him and the Son from eternity; for all God's appointments are eternal. So the word may be taken in Hebr. xiii. 20. *The blood of the covenant.* Such passages are sufficient to justify our divines in terming the counsel of the three persons of the Godhead with regard to the salvation of sinners, a covenant of grace. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that both the Greek word rendered *covenant* and the Hebrew corresponding to it, are much more frequently to be taken for *a revelation of the covenant of grace.* So we are to understand the Lord's covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob; so we are to understand the words in the institution of the Lord's Supper, *This is the cup of the new Testament in my blood.* So in Heb. ix 15,——20. the word is constantly to be understood of *a testamentary deed*, that is, a declaration of our Lord's will concerning our deliverance from sin, confirmed by his death. Now, that is all our divines mean by a dispensation of the covenant of grace.

It is plain, therefore, that the word *covenant*, when it is used in scripture with respect to God's appointed way of saving sinners, has two significations: First, it signifies the council of peace, which was among the persons of the Godhead from eternity: Secondly, the revelation of that council of peace to the church *at sundry times and in divers manners.*

Our divines have expressed the last of these senses by the phrase *Dispensation of the covenant of*

grace; both becauſe it is evidently agreeable to the meaning of the Spirit of God; and becauſe the Engliſh word *covenant* has not ſuch a variety of acceptations as the original word. Our tranſlators, for that reaſon, have rendered the Greek ſubſtantive noun ſometimes *covenant*, ſometimes *teſtament*, and the verb of the ſame derivation, *appointing*.

IT is commonly obſerved, that, in ſcripture, a thing is often ſaid to be or take place when it is only manifeſted: So God is ſaid to *dwell between the cherubims*, that is, he continually manifeſts himſelf there. So when it is ſaid in John vii. 38. *The Spirit was not yet*, it means that the manifeſtation or abundant out-pouring of the Spirit was not yet. Nor is this manner of expreſſion without reaſon, ſince the manifeſtation of a thing gives it a kind of being with reſpect to thoſe to whom it is manifeſted. We have reaſon to believe the Holy Ghoſt never uſes this manner of expreſſion but with peculiar propriety. In the epiſtle to the Hebrews, for example, it was highly proper for the Apoſtle to uſe the word *covenant* for the *revelation of the covenant in Chriſt*, becauſe the Jews againſt whom the apoſtle is there diſputing, took up with the ſhadows in oppoſition to the ſubſtance; they were not only enemies to the new Teſtament-revelation of the covenant of grace; but in the legal pride of their zeal for antiquated ceremonies, they ſhewed much enmity to the ſpiritual nature and gracious deſign of that covenant itſelf.

ADVENTURING, therefore, to follow our divines in the uſe of the phraſe *new Teſtament diſpenſation*, we have now to conſider the characteriſtics of this diſpenſation; in order to know whether thoſe characteriſtics be inconſiſtent with that Public Covenanting which we have ſeen the church under the Old Teſtament, practiſing ſo often to her ſpiritual profit.

In the firſt place, it is the diſtinguiſhing glory of the new Teſtament diſpenſation, that it reveals

the Saviour as already come. Faith's plea under the old Teſtament was, *Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou haſt ſworn unto our fathers from the days of old.* But under the new Teſtament, faith's plea is, *Thou haſt raiſed up an horn of ſalvation, and performed the mercy promiſed to the fathers.*

At the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the church obtained a nearer and fuller view of the covenant of grace. She ſaw the condition of it fulfiled in his obedience unto the death: She ſaw the promiſes of it all yea and amen in him: She ſaw him as her great prophet, taking off the vail that had been ſpread over ſpiritual things, and cauſing her to behold them *with open face*: She ſaw him as her king *meek and having ſalvation*; *exalted to give repentance and the forgiveneſs of ſins.* The new Teſtament is called *the miniſtration of righteouſneſs that excels in glory.* The beginning of the epiſtle to the Hebrews is never to be omitted on this ſubject: *God who at ſundry times and in divers manners ſpake unto the fathers, hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken unto us by his Son.* Surely it was neceſſary that the ſuperiour excellence of the new Teſtament revelation ſhould be ſome way ſuitable to ſo glorious an event as that of the Son of God appearing in our nature and dwelling among us. That excellence, however, was not in the matter, but in the manner of the revelation: the doctrines, the precious promiſes and the moral precepts that God hath ſpoken to us by his Son, are the very ſame which he had ſpoken before *by the prophets, at ſundry times and in divers manners.*

Among thoſe various manners in which God inſtructed his church under the Old Teſtament, were, the appointment of ſacrifices, the Levitical prieſthood, circumciſion, typical perſons and places, external purifications, and all the other obſervances of the ceremonial law. Theſe were ſha-

dows of good things to come; they only signified that Christ had not as yet *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* Now, it is evident, that Christ being already come, such institutions would, of themselves, wax old and unprofitable. They were like a herald who has no more to do after the arrival of the personage whose approach he proclaimed. They were like the pictures of plants and flowers, which the student of Botany makes use of, till he procure specimens of the plants and flowers themselves.

As to the state, the new Testament required no alterations, excepting in a few instances; such as, the distinctions among the tribes, the law with regard to the cities of refuge, the prohibiting of intercourse with lepers or others that were ceremonially unclean: Regulations, which, under the Old Testament, served as a fence to the ceremonial law as it was distinguished from the moral; and prevented the clashing of the church with the state. To prevent that ought still to be carefully studied, wherever the same people are members of the church and of the state. But the ceremonial institutions having obtained their end in the death of Christ, there is no more occasion for the fence of them. As to the intrinsic nature of civil government, and the immediate end of it, which is, the good of civil society, the New Testament made no alterations.

IT is evident, then, that covenanting does not come under the description either of the ceremonial or of the judicial law. It is not a ceremonial institution; because it has nothing in its nature, that necessarily refers to the coming of Christ as a future event: avouching the Lord to be our God by solemn oath says not whether Christ is, or is not come. Nor does it belong to the judicial law. Nobody, it is presumed, will maintain, that it is now unlawful for the members of a political body to enter into an association for the preservation of

their civil and religious liberties, and to confirm it by oaths and subscriptions: the public covenanting, under the Old Testament, if we could consider it in a political view merely, would have been the same, in effect, with such an association. On this supposition, public Covenanting must have belonged, not to that part of the judicial law which respected the peculiar circumstances of the Jews, but to that part of it which is remaining in force. But the truth is, it could not belong to the Judicial law; because, as has been shewn, it was always an ordinance of the church.

FARTHER, as the New Testament has taken away the occasion of the church's observation of the ceremonial law, so it has introduced some positive institutions of its own; such as baptism, the Lord's supper, and we may add, the change of the sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. Positive institutions are useful for preserving lively impressions on the minds of church-members, of the Divine authority of their King and Head; and therefore a few are appointed in the New Testament: and but a few, because simplicity and spirituality were to characterise the worship of the New Testament. In this sense, it is acknowledged, Covenanting is by no means, an ordinance of the New Testament; because it is of a moral nature, and equally binding under every dispensation

WITH regard to moral duties, the New Testament corrects the gross mistakes concerning them, which, in our Saviour's time, prevailed among church-members; it gives further instructions as to the occasions and spiritual manner of performing many of them: and the illustrious display that it makes, of the everlasting covenant in Christ crucified, sets the motives and encouragements to the practice of them in the strongest light. The privileges of our new state in Christ are continu-

ally set forth in all their glory and fulness in order to engage us to the study of holiness. Hence Covenanting, like other moral duties, is now to be gone about in the way of avowing those privileges, and proceeding upon them, rather more explicitly than was usual under the Old Testament.

Another glorious characteristic of the New Testament dispensation is the unlimited extension of the kingdom of Christ among the Gentiles. Christ's visible kingdom was no longer confined to Israel according to the flesh: no longer a national, it now became a catholic church. Nations might still be received into the church; and might still, under that denomination, be acknowledged-ged as belonging to her: But then as she allows no respect of persons, she allows as little of nations. In the New Testament church, Jew and Greek, circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, are all on the level. In this church, the honourable distinctions, the power, the authority of civil societies have no place: for though chuch-members ought to be in all dutiful subjection to these, they must not acknowledge them as belonging to the church; as either limiting, enlarging, or any way affecting the peculiar duties or the peculiar privileges of the church. To be thus spiritual and independent was, indeed, the property of the church, even under the Old Testament; but the New set this property in a fairer and more conspicuous point of view: and what had been the privilege of one nation was then extended to many. So that though the church of Christ cannot now be described as merely a national church; yet many national churches may belong to her, and may acknowledge that they do so, in as open, explicit and solemn a manner, as ever ancient Israel did: which acknowledgement is, in truth, the national Covenanting we contend for.

Thus the coming of Chriſt, with regard to the effects it produced on the church, was like ſome remarkable incident in the hiſtory of a ſtate, which brings about ſo great a revolution, that, though materially the civil conſtitution remains the ſame, almoſt every part of the adminiſtration takes on a new appearance, and the general courſe of government bears obviouſly another character.

That Public Covenanting is ſtill the duty of the Church, appears from the moral nature of it, and from particular precepts of the New Teſtament.

We hope, it will be granted, that our obligations to any thing, if they are deducible from the nature of God, and from the relations we bear to him and to one another, continue, while thoſe relations continue. When we conſider that God is infinitely excellent, that we owe our all to his goodneſs, and that we never can ſufficiently acknowledge our obligations to him; ſurely, it will not then appear unreaſonable to bind ourſelves to his ſervice by what the univerſal ſenſe of mankind holds to be, in all caſes civil and ſacred, the ſtrongeſt of ties; that is, by the religion of an oath. On this ſubject let us hear Arrian repreſenting the ſentiments of Epictetus. "God and 'your guardian angel,' ſays the moral philoſopher, "are always preſent to obſerve your behaviour: "But think you they need light for that purpoſe? "Indeed, they do not need it. To this all-ſee-"ing God you ſhould ſwear allegiance as the ſol-"diers do to Ceſar. The ſoldiers who receive "their wages from Ceſar, ſwear that they will ne-"ver prefer any thing to his intereſt. And will "you not ſwear to God whoſe bounty is incom-"parably greater than Ceſar's? or having ſworn

"will you not keep your oath? But what ſhould "you ſwear? Undoubtedly this: that you will "never be diſobedient to him, nor find fault with "any of his diſpenſations, nor behave improperly "under them; in fine, that you will always be "ready to do and ſuffer whatever is neceſſary." Such were the noble ſentiments of a poor heathen.

As we have much weakneſs both of a natural and of a moral kind; we have occaſion continually for one another's help: and in particular caſes, if we expect the help of others, we naturally deſire to be fully aſſured of it. The deſire is reaſonable; for without ſuch aſſurance, we cannot properly avail ourſelves of their help, nor act in concert with them. Hence according to that rule of our conduct in ſociety, *Do to others whatſoever ye would have them do to you*, thoſe who mutually expect aſſiſtance from one another, ought to give and receive aſſurances of that aſſiſtance; aſſurances proportioned in degree, to the importance of the matter wherein aſſiſtance is required. If it be a matter of the utmoſt importance, ſuch as the glory of God and our own ſalvation are concerned in; then a very great aſſurance, even that of a ſolemn oath, is highly proper. Such an aſſurance is Public Covenanting. It is reaſonable, that we ſwear allegiance to the moſt high God, the Poſſeſſor of heaven and earth: not that He needs any ſuch profeſſion; but that we may ſuitably teſtify to others the homage that we owe him. Our call to do ſo will be the greater, if much rebellion and contempt of his law appear among thoſe around us. Now, ſwearing in this manner, is all we mean by our public Covenanting.

IT has been objected to the morality of Covenanting, "That men are not led, as they general-"ly are with reſpect to moral duties, to agree in "the approbation of it; many chriſtians of diffe-"rent denominations utterly rejecting it."

ALL men have, indeed, a general ſenſe of right and wrong: but as our ignorance of God's law is a branch of the corruption of our nature, that ſenſe of right and wrong is very inſufficient ent for our direction in many inſtances of moral duty. Hence the apoſtle ſays in Rom. vii. 7. *I had not known ſin for I had not known luſt, except the law had ſaid, Thou ſhalt not covet.* The atrocious wickedneſs of the Gentile world proceeded from their ignorance of God and of pure morality, Epheſ. iv. 18, 19. Becauſe the innate ſenſe of right and wrong informs us of many moral duties, it does not follow, that it informs us of all. No moral duty is clearer than this, that we ought to believe whatever God reveals; and yet how few profeſſed Chriſtians feel any uneaſineſs from the moral ſenſe for not believing what themſelves acknowledge to be the word of God. As our natural ſenſe of right and wrong is very defective, ſo it is very weak and eaſily perverted. How can we otherwiſe account for the ſhocking barbarities that ſo generally prevailed in the heathen world; ſuch as ſelling children for ſlaves, expoſing them to wild beaſts, murdering their enemies in cold blood, and human ſacrifices? Many groſs immoralities are mentioned by the polite authors of Greece and Rome as what were commonly practiſed by their countrymen without reproach. Conſcience has been ſtrangely perverted even in good men. We have no reaſon to think that the Patriarchs felt any remorſe for the crime of Poligamy.

THAT men in their preſent ſtate of depravation have a natural ſenſe of *all* moral duties, is an aſſertion altogether unworthy of any one who acknowledges that he needs the ſcriptures to be a *light to his feet and a lamp to his path.* It is an undoubted fact, that, in manifold inſtances, men are inſenſible of moral obligation; eſpecially with regard to ſins of omiſſion againſt the firſt table of the moral law: for example, the omiſſion of ſe-

cret prayer, of family-worſhip, of perſonal faſting.

AFTER all, it may be aſked, Whether a natural ſenſe of the duty of covenanting does not lead the generality of Chriſtians to conſider ſeveral other duties, ſuch as receiving the ſacraments, as equivalent to it? And the conſciences of thoſe who, after having been fully acquainted with what has been offered in ſupport of covenanting, have yet deſpiſed and rejected it, can beſt tell, whether they have not found it a very hard taſk to evade the evidence attending it, and to ſtifle the convictions that roſe naturally in their minds, of its divine warrant and perpetual obligation.

WE may lay it down as an eſtabliſhed maxim, that it is not the uncertain opinion of any denomination of men, whether Papiſts or Proteſtants, whether Calviniſts or Arminians, whether Preſbyterians or Epiſcopalians; but right reaſon and the word of God, that are the true teſts by which we may try and know, whether any thing is a moral duty, or not. To give divine worſhip to a very exalted creature; to worſhip God in ways not appointed in his word; to play at games of chance; to refuſe obedience to the lawful commands of ſuch a government as ours in Britain; to reject the obſervation of the Sabbath as a day which is no leſs holy to the Lord under the New Teſtament, than it was under Old; to countenance the intertainments of the ſtage; in fine, to propagate error under a miſtaken apprehenſion of its being truth: theſe and many other things, defended by different denominations of Chriſtians, are juſtly conſidered by others as contrary to the moral law, and matter of deep humiliation before the Lord. So that public Covenanting is far from being the only moral duty which is controverted among profeſſed Chriſtians. When there is little of the practice of God's law, and much indifference to that ſound doctrine which is according to godlineſs, it is well known that ſpeculative

errors with regard to almoſt all the branches of morality will, in courſe, very ſoon prevail. Sinful practices put people upon deviſing ſinful opinions to defend them.

But it is not only from the nature of the thing, that our obligation to public Covenanting is apparent. However clearly any thing may ſeem to be founded in reaſon, and however ſtrongly we may be bound to it in that reſpect; yet in our application and appropriation of ſuch a thing to the uſe of the church, the authority of Chriſt, as the church's only head, king and lawgiver, is chiefly to be regarded and acknowledged. Thus we are to perform the duties of natural religion, we are to pray and ſing praiſe, becauſe the Lord Chriſt hath appointed us, It is only as far as any obſervance is authoriſed by his word of appointment, that we have ground to look for his gracious preſence and his efficacious bleſſing to attend it. We have ſeen that the authority of Chriſt bound the church under the Old Teſtament to the practice of Covenanting: for then as well as now, Chriſt was the leader and lawgiver of the church, Exod, xxiii. 20, 21. We hope it is evident, too, that Covenanting was by no means abrogated, like the ſhadows of the ceremonial law, at the death of Chriſt. But that is not all. Our Lord has been pleaſed to repeat the command in his new Teſtament.

To this purpoſe is Matt. v. 33. *Ye have heard, that it hath been ſaid by them of old time, Thou ſhalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.* It is evident with reſpect to this and other precepts of the old Teſtament repeated in our Lord's ſermon on the mount, that he not only explains them in order to vindicate them from the corrupt gloſſes of the Phariſees; but enjoins them anew upon his people: So that we cannot reaſonably doubt that this commandment belongs to the law of Chriſt as given to the New Teſtament church. Our Lord

seems not here to repeat the words of any particular text of the Old Testament; but rather to give the sense of several texts, such as Exod. xx. 7. *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.* Deut. x. 21. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God: him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.* Deut. xxiii. 21. *When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord, thou shalt not slack to pay it.* Hence we may gather that more is meant by this command, than merely that what we swear *by* the Lord is binding on us: it means, too, that we should swear *to* him; so much being plainly implied in *performing* oaths to the Lord; so much being expressly required in the parallel texts of the old Testament.

OUR obligation to covenanting is plainly implied in several commands and exhortations of the new Testament. In covenanting, *we present our bodies a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable, which is our reasonable service*, according to Rom. xii. 1, 2. Surely there is no duty so adequate to the import of presenting ourselves a living sacrifice to God, even with respect to our *bodies*, not in secret only, but before the world, as public covenanting; which not only in common with other duties, but with regard to its distinguishing characteristic, is *the giving of our own selves to the Lord;* and the avouching of him to be our God. Again, we are called *to stand fast in the faith; to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, 1 Corinth. xvi. 13. Phil. i. 27. Heb. x. 23. These exhortations having been primarily directed to several churches in their collective capacity, are to be complied with not only in a personal, but in a social way. These exhortations bind us to the use of all such means compatible with our circumstances, as have ever been found profitable to the church of God for promot-

ing her ſtedfaſtneſs in the faith. Theſe exhortations oblige us not only to be, but to appear ſtedfaſt in the faith; oblige us to give every proper aſſurance both to fellow-church-members and to the world, that we are unanimouſly ſo; oblige us, in fine, to be as open and explicit in declaring our engagements to ſtedfaſtneſs as the church ever was in any former period; the general nature of engagements being the ſame in every period; and the duty of openly declaring ourſelves for the Lord Chriſt alone, and of binding ourſelves to him in the moſt ſolemn manner, being no leſs reaſonable and neceſſary under the New Teſtament than under the Old. Theſe and the like paſſages of the New Teſtament being conſidered in this manner, afford arguments for Covenanting which its adverſaries will never be able to invalidate; encouragements to the practice of it which its friends can never ſufficiently improve.

Of Examples of Covenanting in the New Teſtament.

OUR Lord has not contented himſelf, like moſt of thoſe who have taken upon them to give laws to the ſtates and kingdoms of this world, with publiſhing a dry collection of precepts accompanied only with ſevere threatenings againſt the diſobedient. He propoſes his laws in the moſt winning and perſuaſive manner. To engage our attention, he uſes all the variety, all the plainneſs, all the force and elevation, which human language and human nature can admit of. But why does our Lord ſo much more than other lawgivers, to render his laws eaſy and agreeable to his ſubjects? Has he leſs authority than other lawgivers? No, but infinitely more: *He is the bleſſed and only potentate.* His authority is, at once, the moſt righte-

ous and the moſt abſolute. Various, however, and important are the ends of that rational and condeſcending manner in which the Lord Chriſt makes his laws known to mankind. One is obvious: That the obedience and ſubjection of his people may proceed from an inward principle of love; becauſe all the external obedience and ſubjection, proceeding from ſlaviſh principles; ſuch obedience and ſubjection as men who know not the heart muſt often be ſatisfied with; are utterly rejected in the kingdom of Chriſt. Now the various ways in which our Lord addreſſes us in his word, *his precept upon precept, his line upon line, here a little and there a little*, are the moſt proper means, through the Spirit, of begeting and increaſing the principle of love which is at the bottom of all acceptable obedience to his laws.

ONE of thoſe *divers manners* in which the Lord's word ſhews wonderful condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, is inſtruction by examples. Knowing our frames, he has adapted his word to one of the moſt powerful principles of our conſtitution, the principle of imitation. When we ſee others going before us in any duty, we think the difficulty and the danger grow leſs: Thoſe who lead the way ſeem to invite us to follow them: Of courſe, we wiſh to be like or equal to them. Beſides, the new nature has a peculiar ſuitableneſs, as indeed to every part of the written word, ſo particularly to the examples of it. Believers are ſtill members of the ſame myſtical body of Chriſt as the ſaints recorded in ſcripture; they have the ſame head, the ſame Spirit, the ſame faith, the ſame inheritance. No wonder, then, that the examples of Abraham, of David, of Peter and of Paul are ſtill dear to believers, and congenial to their heart.

THERE is great reaſon to think, that examples are to be found in God's word contained in the ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, of all the duties that the divine law requires either of indivi-

duals or of societies: The more comprehensive duties indeed, such as fortitude in resisting temptation, zeal for the glory of God, concern for the welfare of the church, are more fully and expressly exemplified: but other duties which are included in and easily deduced from these are, some of them, not so expressly exemplified. Such is the duty of refusing to endanger the loss of one's life in a duel, for no other reason than the folly of another who wants to run that hazard. We cannot say, there is an example of such refusal in the whole Bible; but then the implication of it in multitudes of examples that shew the value we ought to put upon our own life, and that of others, makes the duty as clear as an express example of it would do.

We have shewn that Public Covenanting was abundantly exemplified under the Old Testament. We shall now offer some observations on the examples of the New Testament.

To begin with the example of Christ; we observe, that though he magnified the law by a divinely glorious obedience on all occasions; yet it is no way necessary, nay, from the endless variety of circumstances which daily occur, it is absurd to suppose, that he was in every particular situation wherein any of his followers may be. It is often their duty to act as civil magistrates, or as members of a court of judicature; characters that our Lord never assumed. So he had no call to the duty of public covenanting; a duty which is competent to a visible church alone. Though our Lord testified against the corruptions of the Jewish church, yet as he continued to attend regularly on her ordinances, he never did any thing that interfered with her public administrations. Hence if the Jewish church had then returned to the Lord in the way of covenanting, as every one must allow they might warrantably have done, our Saviour, though he could not have covenanted like church members, who as having been personally chargeable

with sin, were returning to the Lord, would at least have countenanced them in the exercise.

IT may be asked, how we are to regard the example of Christ, in circumstances or situations wherein we know not that he ever acted?

IN the first place, we may always imitate him in his regard to the whole will of God. In the second place, we should consider whether we may not observe, in the life of Christ, some exemplification of a duty like what is incumbent upon us, of the same kind, or equivalent to it. We do not read that he ever gave money to the poor; but he gave hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, salvation to the miserable captives of sin and Satan. We do not find that he engaged in a particular worldly calling; but we are certain, that he never ceased to promote the welfare of society; for *he always went about doing good.* In the same manner, though he never joined with the church in public covenanting, we see him in every circumstance of his life, bearing a public and particular testimony to the truth. Though a simple affirmation from him whose name is THE TRUTH, was enough to command the assent of every reasonable creature; yet he often accompanied what he affirmed with the most solemn asseverations. Of that kind was his frequent repetition of the word, *Verily.* When the high priest adjured him to tell, whether he was the Christ the Son of God; he answered in the most pointed manner, I AM, or THOU HAST SAID. The solemn assurance that he gives us, in Matth. v. 18. is little, if at all, inferior to an oath: *Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass till all be fulfilled.* The good confession that he witnessed before Pontius Pilate was of the same public, particularizing, and ascertaining nature as our covenanting, John xviii. 37.

NOR should it be forgotten here that our Lord covenanted with his eternal Father. The love which he manifested in his fulfilment of that covenant is

propoſed to our imitation, and ſo in ſome meaſure may his covenanting itſelf; eſpecially, as he compares the Father's tranſacting with him to his tranſacting with us, Luke xxii. 29. He covenanted to obey as a bond ſervant, that we might covenant to regard him, and to follow him as dear children. The truth is, our covenanting derives its name, its nature, and all its uſefulneſs from its conformity to that everlaſting covenant.

The hiſtory of the New Teſtament is conciſe. Continued only to about the thirtieth year after our Lord's aſcenſion, it informs us, how ſucceſsfully the apoſtles preached the goſpel; how the hand of the Lord was with them when they had no leſs, but, for the moſt part, far greater outward difficulties to ſtruggle with than any of their ſucceſſors have; and how the power of the Lord was revealed in the planting of the firſt churches among the Gentiles. But we have not a regular hiſtory of any one of thoſe churches for any conſiderable courſe of time. A few ſelect particulars only of their proceedings which infinite wiſdom ſaw neceſſary to complete the rule of our faith and practice, are left on record. Why ſhould we wonder that public covenanting is not found among ſuch particulars, ſince the precepts and examples on this head in the Old Teſtament, were clear, were full, were eaſy to be applied to the uſe of the New Teſtament church?

We have, however, a remarkable hint concerning the covenanting of the Macedonians which muſt not be overlooked. It is in the eighth chapter of the ſecond epiſtle to the Corinthians, where the apoſtle having ſpoken of the liberal contribution of the Macedonians for the relief of their poor brethren in Judea, adds, *And this they did not as we hoped, but firſt gave their ownſelves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.*

The opinion of a late ingenious writer on covenanting, that there is an Ellipſis in the latter part of

the verſe, ſeems reaſonable. In the fourth verſe, the Macedonians are ſaid to have uſed much importunity with Paul and his fellow-labourers to accept of what they had contributed toward the aſſiſtance of their poor brethren; *to receive the gift, and take upon them the fellowſhip of the miniſtring to the ſaints.* The verſe under conſideration ſhews in what manner they proceeded to deliver their contribution to the apoſtles. It is obſerved, that *they firſt gave their ownſelves to the Lord;* and then followed their giving to the apoſtles: what was given to the apoſtles, as we cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe it to be any thing elſe than their contribution for the poor ſaints, is eaſily ſupplied from the former verſe. This way of underſtanding the paſſage is the more reaſonable, that we cannot ſuppoſe the Macedonians would, in the moſt natural ſenſe of the words, *give themſelves to the apoſtles*, who were not lords of their faith but helpers of their joy: nor do we read in any other place of churches *giving themſelves* to the apoſtles.

IT is a remarkable circumſtance, that the Macedonians, on this occaſion, did more than the apoſtle and his brethren expected. This cannot be underſtood of their profeſſion of Chriſtianity, becauſe they had made that ſome time before; nor of their participation of the ſacraments, becauſe that was common in all the churches; nor of the abundance of their liberality, which the apoſtle celebrates in verſe ſecond, and from which the act of giving their ownſelves to the Lord is plainly diſtinguiſhed; nor, laſtly, of their frame and diſpoſition of mind in contributing to the help of their brethren, becauſe it is mentioned as a particular action equally diſtinct, and equally open to obſervation as that of their contributing toward the relief of the poor ſaints; for they firſt gave their ownſelves to the Lord, and then their contribution to the apoſtles.

IT is obſervable, too, that the phraſe, *They gave their ownſelves to the Lord*, correſponds exactly to

the various periphrases by which the duty of covenanting is expressed in the Old Testament; such as *avouching the Lord to be our God, joining ourselves to the Lord, making a covenant that we shall be the Lord's people, and saying we are the Lord's.* Though we are, no doubt, *to yield ourselves to the Lord* in every duty, yet we do not recollect, that there is a duty besides covenanting, to the performance of which, the above mentioned expressions or any equivalent to them, are so constantly and uniformly applied.

But how comes it about, may some say, that we never find the apostle giving the Corinthians any directions with regard to covenanting?

We answer, that the apostolic approbation was a sufficient intimation of the duty of the Corinthians. Besides with regard to the warrant and the manner of covenanting, the Corinthians had the same authority and directions of the Old Testament which the Macedonians had had: for as there were manifold duties enjoined in the Old Testament, which Christians had no ground to consider as abrogated by the New Testament; so those who searched the scriptures diligently, and sought the aid of the Spirit of truth, might set forward in the practice of such duties without any new recommendation of them.

It appears to have been a circumstance that did much to render the conduct of the Macedonians in this matter beyond expectation praise-worthy, that they were led from an attentive regard to the written word as their only rule, *to give themselves to the Lord*, without waiting for any oral recommendation of the duty from the apostles. In this, no doubt Paul rejoiced, as a nurse does to see the unexpected but successful attempt of her child to walk alone.

We need not ask, why the apostle does not insist upon covenanting as upon the duty of contributing to the relief of poor saints; since it is plainly the principal design of the apostle in this place to inforce

the practice of the latter as what the present dispensations of providence were calling for; whereas it is but transiently or by the way that he takes notice of the former. How often do the inspired writers expatiate and enlarge on some duties because of their suitableness to a particular occasion; not that other duties which they only mention, are of less obligation; but in order to impress us in a lively manner with the importance and necessity of attending to the present calls of providence?

Of the Period between the Close of the Cannon of Scripture and the Reformation from Popery.

THE examples we have hitherto treated of, taken from the Old and New Testament, are obligatory in themselves as a necessary part of the only rule of our faith and practice. These we are now to produce have no such authority. They are examples that we are bound to imitate as far as they are agreeable to the word of God; no farther. They are to be recognised, because it is necessary to hold fast what the church has already attained; because, too, it should encourage church members to the practice of any duty, when they learn that in the case of those who have gone before them, it has met with many remarkable tokens of Heaven's regard and acceptance.

EVEN in the first century many abominable errors, such as the blasphemies of Ebion and of Cerinthus against the divinity of Christ, sprung up and troubled the church. It is generally allowed, that the apostle John had these blasphemies in his eye, when he wrote his gospel: and is it not reasonable to suppose that the Christians at that time, would give one another explicit assurances that they were to abide by the testimony of John, and that they were of one

mind and of one judgment, particularly as to the Godhead and eternal Sonſhip of Chriſt? Though we cannot find that they obſerved all the formalities of covenanting which the church has warrantably uſed at other times, yet ſo far as their open declarations and apologies ſerved to aſcertain their joint agreement with reſpect to any matter of profeſſion or of practice, ſo far in reality were they covenanters.

We may take notice of a well known paſſage in the 97th of the 10th book of Pliny's Epiſtles. He writes the Emperor Trajan concerning thoſe who had been prevailed on to renounce Chriſtianity, that even ſuch conſtantly averred, that all their crime was, that they uſually met on an appointed day before the dawn, that they ſung an hymn to Chriſt as to God, that they bound themſelves by oath, not as the heathens alledged, to any thing that was wicked, but to abſtain from theft, from robbery, from adultery, from violating their promiſe, and from unfaithfulneſs to their truſt.* Pliny writes this, not as a report, but as the confeſſion of the Chriſtians themſelves; a circumſtance which leads us to conſider it as a literal account of facts.

The Creeds and Confeſſions of the antient churches may be called ſolemn covenants, in regard they expreſſed the conſent or agreement of the true church in certain articles of belief, or in certain rules of practice; articles and rules which were pointed in the moſt direct manner, againſt particular errors and particular evil practices. When the antient Chriſtians publicly gave their aſſent, as we have reaſon to believe they did frequently, to thoſe Creeds and Confeſſions, their doing ſo, was in reality public covenanting.‡

* *Seque ſacramento non in ſcelus aliquod obſtringere, ſed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne fidem fallerent, ne depoſitum appellati abnegarent.*

‡ "It was a commendable cuſtom," ſays Witſius, "of the "Chriſtian church to require of every grown perſon a public de- "claration of his faith, before his admiſſion to baptiſm. After- "ward, the children of Chriſtians were uſually preſented before the "biſhop or paſtor, in order to make the ſame declaration. For as

So early as the beginning of the second century, what is commonly called the Creed of the apostles (because it is a summary of the apostles, doctrine) appears to have been made use of, as a test for distinguishing the lovers of true Christianity from heretics.

IN covenanting it is not enough that we enter into such bonds as the church has gone into in former periods: it is necessary that we form a new bond suited to our present circumstances. So the antient churches framed new creeds and confessions as new heresies rose. The truth of our Saviour's deity was plainly asserted in the apostle's Creed in these words, *I believe in Jesus Christ his* (the eternal Father's) *only Son, our Lord.* But Paulus Samosatenus and others attempted to overturn the scriptural doctrine of the Deity of Christ by new opinions about the constitution of his person, confounding the properties of the two natures. This occasioned the drawing up of the Creed which bears the following title: *A determination of the bishops assembled in the Synod at Antioch concerning the incarnation of the word of God, Son of*

X

"they were incapable at the time of their baptism, being then in "their infancy, of giving the church that solemn and public testi- "mony of their adherence to her faith, it was judged necessary that "as soon as they had passed the period of childhood, they should "be brought by the parents before the bishop who might examine "them according to the catechism or form of sound words then in "use. Hence the church of Rome derived her pretended sacrament "of confirmation. The brethren of Bohemia, too, imitated this "ancient custom: Among them, the parents presented their chil- "dren at twelve years of age, to the pastor of the church, that the "children might make a public profession of their faith, and that it "it might appear whether the parents had performed their engage- "ments which they had come under at the baptism of their children. "A similar practice obtains in the church of England. It is indeed "a pity but it were likewise customary in our own churches, to "make those whom we admit to the sacred communion, profess "the Lord in the most explicit manner before the whole church: "Those who refuse, on this or the other vain pretence, to make "such a profession even before the eldership or privately to the "pastor, would do well to remember what our Lord has denounced "against such as are ashamed of his word." *Exercitat. De fide Salvifica.*

the Father; and that Synod's determination with regard to Paulus Samosatenus. The Creed itself begins in this manner: "We acknowledge our Lord Jesus "Christ who according to the Spirit was begotten "of the Father before time, but according to the "flesh was born of the virgin in the last days; be- "ing one person consisting of the heavenly divinity "and of human flesh." After a variety of considerations serving to distinguish between the two natures in the person of Christ, the conclusion is to the following purpose: "By the above distinctions and "explications we do not mean any division of that "one undivided person; but only to shew that there "is no confusion of the distinguishing properties of "of the flesh and of the eternal word; at the same "time that we hold what regards the undivided uni- "on of the two natures."

TOWARD the beginning of the fourth century, Arius made a new attack upon the scriptural doctrine of the trinity. He indeed allowed the Son to be in some sense God: but then he denied that he was co-essential or co-eternal with the Father. It was his great maxim, ην ποτε, οτε ουκ ην. The church was not contented, upon this occasion, with the assertion of our Saviour's Deity in former creeds. Something pointed against the novelties of the Arian heresy was requisite. Hence the council of Nice in Bythinia, consisting of members sent from all parts of the Christian world, agreed (though neither the bishop of Rome nor his legate were there to procure such agreement) upon a new creed, condemning the errors of Arius, and asserting the contrary truths. "We believe," says that venerable council, "in one "God Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible "and invisible: And in one Lord Jesus Christ, "the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, "that is, of the substance of the Father, God of "God, light of light, true God of true God; be-

" gotten, not made; of the same substance with the " Father; by whom all things were made, both in " heaven and on earth; who for us men and for " our salvation descended, was incarnate, became " man, suffered, rose on the third day, went up in- " to the heavens, and is to come to judge the living " and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Ghost. " But as to those who say, that there was a time " when the Son of God did not exist, that he was " not before his birth, that he was made of nothing, " that he is of another substance or essence than the " Father, or that he is created, or that he is subject " to modification or change; the catholic and apos- " tolic church holds them accursed."

SOME of the artifices that are used in our own times, to prejudice people against the forms that have been found necessary in going about covenanting, are only a repetition of the artifices which some of the more subtle and refined Arians employed to draw the unwary from the doctrine of the Nicene Creed. The credit of so scriptural a testimony to the truth being much established by a council held in the year 359 at Ariminum in Italy, the Arians finding it impracticable to set it aside altogether, had recourse to another expedient. They tried to render such terms in the Creed as were pointed the most directly against the Arian opinions odious and detestable to the people. Valens and Ursacius, two leaders of the party, pretended an uncommon zeal for the peace and unity of the church: " Ay," said they, " the peace and unity of the church might " easily be restored, were it not for two or three " hard words," such as, *essence*, *consubstantial*, and *subsistence*. " These same hard words," continued the artful haranguers, " do much harm, as they are " an occasion of stumbling to the weak and ignor- " ant who cannot understand them: and why should " we think it necessary to retain them, since they are

"not to be found in the Bible? Let us hold the "doctrine of the Bible; and let us drop the obnoxi- "ous terms."* By so specious pretences they subverted the faith of many.

About twenty years after the Council at Arminum, another was held at Constantinople. The immediate occasion of it was the heresy which Macedonius bishop of Constantinople had newly broached, denying the deity of the Holy Ghost. This council framed a new Confession of the church's faith as a proper way of repelling the new attack that was now made upon it. The first part of that Confession or Creed is a repetition of the Nicene; a circumstance that shewed how careful the Council was to hold fast what the church had attained. The latter part again, is a scriptural assertion of the truth pointed expressly against the error of Macedonius. "We believe," says the Council in the name of the church, "in the "Holy Ghost, the Lord, the quickner, who pro- "ceedeth from the Father, who is worshipped and "glorified with the Father and the Son, who spoke "by the prophets."

Various other Creeds might be produced; particularly, that of Athanasius, which is a fuller exhibition of the church's faith in opposition to the above mentioned and various other errors: but what we have said may serve to shew how analogous they were to the form of words used in covenanting.

How far the subscriptions to the Emperor Zeno's Henoticon or epistle recommending unity ‡, resembled public covenanting, the reader may judge from the following account of it. This epistle was published in the year 470, when the church was much distracted by the errors of Nestorius, on the one hand, who held the two natures of Christ to be two persons,

* Forbesii Instruct. Hist. Lib. i. Cap. 2. § 7.

‡ See a Copy of the Epistle taken from Evagrius, Forbesii Inst. Histor. Lib. iii. Cap. 10.

and of Eutyches, on the other, who, confounding the perperties of the two natures, held them to be one. The Emperor in this epistle confirms several of the Creeds and Confessions of the church, and condemns the contrary errors. Toward the close he expresses himself to this effect: "Sensible that neither the or-"thodox churches any where, nor the godly priests "set over them, nor our empire have received or "do receive any creed or article of faith, in the way "of relinquishing the holy doctrine we have men-"tioned concerning the trinity and the person of "Christ; we have declared ourselves one with the "orthodox churches as to that doctrine. We have "written these things, not that we mean to bring "any thing new into the faith of the church, but "that we may give you full assurance of our adhe-"rence to sound doctrine." Here the Emperor professes himself a church-member, declaring himself one with the holy bishops and people to whom he addresses his epistle. He specifies particular truths which he approves, and particular errors which he condemns. He gives his fellow-church members the fullest assurance of his attachment to sound doctrine. The orthodox generally subscribed this epistle. What meant that subscription? Surely, that the subscriber gave his fellow-church-members the like assurances, as the Emperor had done, of his unfeigned stedfastness in the faith, and of his opposition to the mentioned errors. The analogy of such subscription to public covenanting is worthy of observation.

SOME objections might be made to this epistle, and perhaps more to the character and views of Zeno. Considered however as an effort to unite Christians in the defence of the truth, the epistle is highly commendable. An eminent writer of ecclesiastical history, indeed, charges the Emperor with favouring the Eutychian heresy. But in this epistle, though the Council of Chalcedon is not named, the confounding of the two natures in the person of Christ

is as expreſly condemned as the dividing of them: Eutyches is branded as a heretic no leſs than Neſtorius.

In the ſixth and following centuries the Papal tyranny was advancing to its height. Hence the church of Chriſt, with reſpect to the purity both of her faith and her practice, was brought into retirement and obſcurity. The church, as ſhe is repreſented in the 12th chapter of the Revelation, began to ſojourn in the wilderneſs. Yet in this period, dark and diſmal as it continued till the dawn of the reformation, we have ſeveral inſtances of the Lord raiſing up eminent men to bear teſtimony to the truth; Chalemagne, for example, toward the cloſe of the eighth century, who wrote ſo well againſt the idolatrous uſe of images; and Berengarius who made ſo vigorous a ſtand againſt the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation. We ſee noble examples of meekneſs, of patience, of humility, of ſelf-denial, of unſhaken fortitude and perſevering faithfulneſs in maintaining the cauſe of Chriſt, of the efficacy of divine truth, and of the conſtraining influence of the love of Chriſt, in what is handed down to us concerning the Wickliffites and Lollards in England, and concerning the Huſſites, the brethren and ſiſters (as they were called) in Bohemia. But we can hardly expect to find any diſtinct and formal examples of public covenanting, (a duty almoſt impracticable, but in an organized and regular ſtate of the church) among the Waldenſes, the Wickliffites, or the brethren of Bohemia, *who feared continually every day becauſe of the oppreſſor who was ready to deſtroy.* While the church was in a poor captive condition at Babylon, ſhe could not well either ſing the ſongs of Zion, or go about public covenanting.

Of

Of ſeveral of the Reformed Churches.

WHOEVER conſiders the ſtate of Europe at the beginning of the ſixteenth century; how deeply men were ſunk in ignorance and ſuperſtition; how firmly the Papal dominion was eſtabliſhed; how it had found means to ſpread its roots through all the temporal and eternal concerns of mankind; how artfully the Popiſh religion ſuited itſelf to the taſte of depraved human nature; whoever duly conſiders theſe and other circumſtances, will readily acknowledge, that the reformation from Popery was nearly as difficult as the reformation from Paganiſm had been; and that Eraſmus, humanly ſpeaking, had ſome reaſon to ſay, that Luther undertook what the apoſtles themſelves would hardly have undertaken. But it was the Lord's doing, and it was wondrous in our eyes.

As the firſt reformers had many difficulties to overcome, as they had crafty and powerful enemies on every ſide, it was neceſſary for them to act as one body, and to uſe the proper means of preſerving their union, and of aſcertaining it in ſuch a manner as would beget ſincere confidence among themſelves. It was one of the moſt obvious of theſe means to enter into a league or covenant. Accordingly the Smalcaldic league was concluded ſoon after Luther had ſhaken off the yoke of papal authority, and declared his full and final ſeparation from Antichriſt. The occaſion of that ſolemn engagement was as follows.

THE Emperor Charles the fifth, a prince of unbounded ambition, ſet himſelf to check the progreſs of reformation, and to hinder the ſpreading of that pure doctrine, which now ſeemed a novelty by

reaſon of the long continued cuſtom and preſcription which the groſſeſt corruptions had obtained. The Emperor's reſentment againſt Luther did not proceed from any great regard he had for the Pope: againſt whom in the year 1527, he carried his victorious arms to the city of Rome itſelf: Rome was taken, was plundered; the pope and his cardinals being forced to ſuffer all the contumely and ill-uſage that military inſolence is accuſtomed to exerciſe. * Charles indeed oppoſed the proceedings of Luther, only becauſe he was afraid that the religious factions at home would hinder him from the proſecution of his great deſigns of conqueſt, and of empire abroad.

In a diet or meeting of the Germanic princes held at Worms in the year 1521, after Luther had been teaſed in vain to retract the doctrine he had propagated in his writings; no other argument having been uſed for his conviction, even according to the account of Maimbourg the Jeſuit, than this; that his doctrine had been condemned by Councils, particularly, by that of Conſtance; the Emperor cauſed an edict to be read to the diet, in which he expreſſed his reſolution to ſupport the religion which he had received from the emperors and the kings his predeceſſors, and which a poor apoſtate monk † was endeavouring to overturn: he then declared Luther a ſchiſmatick and a heretic whom it was unlawful to receive or protect.

Though a diet held at Spires about five years after, averawed on the one hand, by the growing

* Maimbourg in the ſecond book of his hiſtory of Lutheraniſm, gives a very pathetic account of this ſack of Rome. An emblem, we hope, of the final ruin that ſtill awaits the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.

† Un miſerable Moine apoſtat. The kings and great men of the world have always been offended at the croſs of Chriſt. Herod and Charles the fifth were of the ſame mind. The one ſet the maſter, the other the ſervant at nought. Maimbourg Hiſt. Du. Lutheraniſme.

ſtrength of the reformers, and afraid on the other, of the Turkiſh arms now threatening the empire, ſeemed to allow every one the free exerciſe of religion, till a general or at leaſt a national council ſhould be called to determine the differences about religion: yet the diet at the ſame place in the year 1529, made a new decree confirming the above mentioned edict of Worms; ordaining that the princes, while they waited the calling of a general council, ſhould endeavour the re eſtabliſhment of the ancient religion, wherever the new had obtained; that the Maſs ſhould not be aboliſhed, nor the Catholicks (for ſo the Papiſts call themſelves) hindered from the free exerciſe of their religion; that none of thoſe Catholicks ſhould be allowed to profeſs Luther's religion; that the Sacramentarians (ſo the followers of Zuinglius and Carolſtad were called) ſhould be baniſhed the empire; and in fine, that miniſters ſhould no where be allowed to preach the goſpel, otherwiſe than according to the received opinions of the church of Rome. John the Elector of Saxony, George marquis of Brandenburg, the two dukes of Lunenburg, the landgrave of Heſſe, the prince of Anhalt, and the deputies from fourteen cities of the Empire, proteſted againſt the determination of the diet, as being intended to put an entire ſtop to the reformation. From this time the reformers, on account of that ſolemn proteſtation, were called PROTESTANTS.

IN the following year, a diet of the empire was held at Augſburg, in which the Proteſtant princes laid before the Emperor a confeſſion of their faith, which Melanchton is ſaid to have drawn up in the ſofteſt terms. This repreſentation of the reformed religion is commonly known by the name of the Augſburg Confeſſion. The Proteſtants however, gained nothing. The diet was concluded with a decree, that the Catholic or Popiſh religion alone ſhould be exercited all over the empire: forbidding all ranks

of perſons, under ſevere penalties, to change any thing, in the doctrine, in the uſages and ceremonies of the church, till it ſhould be otherwiſe ordained by a council.

The Proteſtants alarmed by a ſuch decree, were apprehenſive that the Emperor, and his brother Ferdinand, and the reſt of the Popiſh princes who had been preſent at the diet, would unite their arms to cruſh the reformation. On that account, the proteſtant princes aſſembled at Smalcald in the territory of the Landgrave of Heſſe, in order to deliberate on the meaſures which their ſituation required. It was here that they entered unanimouſly into a ſolemn league that they would exert themſelves to the utmoſt in the defence of one another againſt all that ſhould trouble them in the exerciſe of their Evangelical religion. They ſolicited the cities of the empire which had embraced the reformed religion to come into their covenant; and the moſt part of the cities came into it.

Should it be ſaid, that the Smalcaldic league was merely of a political nature, and therefore, not an example of the covenanting for which we plead: we anſwer, that there were at leaſt two things in it, which may lead us to conſider it as a religious covenant. One is, that thoſe who joined in this league plainly declared their agreement in ſeveral particular points of truth and duty, as being the teſtimony of Chriſt in their day. This is plain from their unanimous approbation of the Augſburg Confeſſion, from the details of religious grievances which they laid before ſeveral diets of the Empire, and from their engagement to defend the Evangelical religion as oppoſed to the corruptions of Popery. The other thing is, that they declared their adherence to thoſe points as what they were warranted and required to hold by the authority of God's word. This appeared not only from the tenor of the league, but from all their petitions and remonſtrances to Charles or to the council of the Empire, and from their anſwers to the

declarations of the Pope's legate; in which they conſtantly appealed to the ſcripture as the only ſtandard by which they could ever conſent to have their tenets tried and examined. We cannot conclude this league to have been merely political, becauſe it may be viewed as a prudential meaſure neceſſary for their political ſafety; in regard that it is often our true intereſt even in this world to cleave to the Lord in the way of duty: nor is it neceſſary to view it as merely political, becauſe thoſe who joined in it, engaged to uſe external means of preſerving themſelves and their ſtates; ſince the uſe of ſuch means, as a duty of God's word, might be engaged to in any religious exerciſe. Though this league was profeſſedly gone into from a regard to God's authority, with a ſingle eye to his glory, for the preſervation and advancement of the Evangelical religion, to ſuppoſe that nothing more was meant than to forward political views, and to promote a worldly intereſt, is a reproach which one would never expect to hear from any who have a ſincere regard for the character of thoſe reformers.

OUR Reformers from Popery took every opportunity of ſhewing how ſenſible they were of the propriety of entering into bonds for ſecuring mutual confidence both in the profeſſion of the truth, and in their oppoſition to the common enemy. Hence the concordate which Bucer and Melanchton drew up with a view to ſettle the differences between Luther and Oecolampadius concerning the ſacrament. Hence, too, the following tranſaction between Calvin and the church of Zurich. It had been reported that Calvin's doctrine with reſpect to the Lord's Supper, differed from what was taught by the miniſters of that church. Calvin, deſiring to leave no room for ſuſpicion on that head, goes to Zurich and converſes on the ſubject with the miniſters there. The reſult of their converſation was a formula or confeſſion of faith drawn up by Calvin and Bullinger, one of the miniſters of Zurich; which

confeſſion was approved afterward by the churches of Switzerland, and of Rhetia.* "By this bond," ſays Melchior Adams in his life of Bullinger, "not "only theſe churches were united more cloſely; but "many good men even in other places were the more "eſtabliſhed in the profeſſion of the truth."

BESIDES, the neceſſity of ſuch religious bonds is acknowledged in the cuſtom which has prevailed univerſally among the Proteſtant churches, of requiring their members to ſubſcribe their ſeveral confeſſions of faith. Some have complained of this cuſtom as incroaching on the right of private judgment. But it has been ſufficiently vindicated on the ſame principle on which we plead for public covenanting; which principle is, that ſome ſuch method of aſcertaining our religious perſuaſion to one another, is abſolutely neceſſary to an union of our endeavours in ſupport of any particular points of truth or duty.

A CHURCH declares her public judgment in her Confeſſions and Covenants. And for a perſon to become a member of that church is to profeſs an agreement between his private judgment, and her public judgment: So far then as there is ſuch agreement, he is to be accounted a member of that church; no farther. Hence it appears that we no more offend againſt private judgment, in ſubſcribing the confeſſions and covenants, than in being avowed members of the reformed churches.

THE ſeven United Provinces have ſhewn their ſenſe of the advantages of public covenanting. They entered into a ſolemn confederacy in defence of their liberty and of the Proteſtant religion againſt Philip II. and ſupported that confederacy with a vigour, a perſeverance and ſucceſs, which will be remembered for ever, as an encouragement to a generous people, in ſtruggling for thoſe rights and privileges, which

* Rhetia the country of the Griſons on the Alps, near the Hyrcinian forreſt.

being the gift of heaven, are never to be surrendered to any prince, or pope, or prelate.

AFTERWARD, when the provinces were very much distracted by the controversy with the Arminians, and nearly involved in the horrors of a civil war, the Synod of Dort was held. Divines were invited to that assembly, not only from the United Provinces, but also from Britain, from the Palatinate, from Brandenburg, from Hesse, from Embden, and several other places. Various were the advantages which rose from the Synod of Dort. The Calvinist doctrine in opposition to the Arminians, was clearly ascertained: the union of the adherents to that evangelical doctrine, was greatly promoted, not only in the seven provinces, but in every Protestant country. In these provinces, particularly, the Calvinists being strengthened and encouraged, their adversaries found themselves unable to carry on their designs against them, and civil discord began to subside. The shifts and artifices by which the Arminians used to disguise their tenets being now fully laid open by the Synod, and those who defended its decisions, many of the Arminians became votaries of Socinianism, and all of them were seen verging to that blasphemous extreme. So beneficial is the unanimous, and unequivocal appearance of church-members on the side of truth and duty.

THE Protestants in France, too, found it necessary to enter into such engagements. In the former part of the last century, which was the time of their greatest purity and faithfulness, the oath of union was sworn and subscribed by all the deputies of the reformed churches of France assembled in the National Synod at Privas, in Vivaretz. "We have, "say they, "in the name of all our churches, and for their "their good, and for the service of their Majesties, "sworn and protested, and we do swear and protest, "(promising also our utmost endeavour that these "very self same protestations shall be ratified in and

"by all our provinces) to remain inſeparably united "and conjoined in that Confeſſion of Faith of the "reformed churches of this kingdom read in this "Synod, approved and ratified by every one of us, "ſwearing not only in our own name, but alſo in the "reſpective names of all the churches of our pro- "vinces which have deputed us unto the Synod, "that we will live and die in it. As alſo we proteſt, "in our own and their names, to keep inviolably "that eccleſiaſtical diſcipline eſtabliſhed in the re- "formed churches of this kingdom, and to ſee its "cannons obſerved for the better government of "theſe our churches, and the reformation of life "and manners: acknowledging that it is moſt a- "greeable to God's holy word, whoſe authority is "ſupreme."*

INDEED, there are none of the Proteſtant churches, that have not entered into oaths and covenants, either more or leſs explicit, to cleave to the Lord in the profeſſion of the reformed religion.

Of the riſe and progreſs of Public Covenanting in Scotland.

THE influence of the ambitious and bigoted houſe of Lorrain, was a chief obſtacle to the reformation in Scotland. After the death of James the fifth, his Queen Dowager, who was of that Popiſh family, having got the adminiſtration of the government into her hands, was at length brought wholly under the direction of her French relations, and was led by their counſels into a ſeries of meaſures as contrary to civil liberty and public faith as to the true religion. Hence our reformers had to contend for their political rights, as well as for the goſpel and the pure worſhip of God: Hence both the

* Quick's Synodicon, Acts of the Synod of Privs, Chap. iii.

good of the nation and of the church are evidently meant in the various covenants which we are going to mention.

IT was in the year 1557, that the friends of the reformation, among whom were several of high rank, first entered into a common bond. In this bond they "promise to apply themselves to forward and esta-"blish the most blessed word of God and his con-"gregation; to have faithful ministers to minister "Christ's gospel and sacraments to his people. Un-"to the holy word," say they, "and congregation "we do join us; and so do forsake and renounce "the congregation of Satan, with all the superstiti-"ous abominations and idolatry thereof."

FROM this time the Protestants went under the name of the Congregation.

A memorable incident in 1559, hastened on the Reformation. Much people in Perth having embraced the reformed religion, were desirous of being better instructed in it by the faithful preachers of the word. One day as the people were just come from hearing the famous Mr. John Knox, who had been setting before them the heinousness of Popish idolatry, a priest, in contempt of such doctrine, invited them to witness the celebration of the Mass. A boy observing the priest cried out; "Shall we "suffer the practice of that idolatry which the word "of God so plainly condemns? The enraged priest struck the boy. The former having so much forgotten the dignity of his character, the latter seemed at liberty to disregard it, and threw a stone at him. Mean time, the resentment of the people who were looking on, was raised to the highest pitch by the impudence of the Popish idolator. They flew to pull down his altar, and to lay all its gaudy ornaments in the dust. After that, they proceeded to destroy other monuments of idolatry.

SUPPOSE these buildings to have had as much elegant design and masterly execution as the noblest e-

difices of antient Greece: Suppose too, that the people had so much knowledge of architecture, and correctness of taste as would have been necessary to make them set a just value on such works; yet after all, considering that they had been the haunts of lewdness, of the grossest superstition and idolatry; considering that their pomp and splendor had been used as a mean of diverting the poor people's attention from the simplicity of God's word; of leading them to take up with outward shew instead of spiritual worship; and consequently, of detaining them in that ignorance by which their souls were ruined; considering these circumstances, we need not wonder at the zeal of our forefathers to destroy the structures which they now saw had been subservient to such mischievous purposes, however valuable they might have been as works of art. "Men's consci-"ences," says Mr. Knox, "were so beaten with the "word, that they had no respect to their own par-"ticular profit, but only to abolish idolatry, the pla-"ces and monuments thereof."

The Queen regent, pretended the greatest resentment for the loss of so many fine buildings; but in reality was grieved that her schemes, or rather those of the house of Lorrain, were likely to be ruined by the rapid progress of the reformation.

She vowed revenge; and sent against Perth Monsieur D'Oysel with some troops which had lately come over from France. That commander having approached within a few miles of the town, had intelligence of such numbers coming in daily to the assistance of the inhabitants, that he thought it was by no means adviseable to make an attack. A treaty was set on foot. The Queen regent, as the situation of her affairs required, gave her promise, that the people should not be molested for what they had done in destroying the religious houses; that they should be allowed the free exercise of their religion; and that she should withdraw the French soldiers imme-

diately. But the Lords of the Congregation ſuſpecting theſe promiſes, and fearing the dangers they were ſtill expoſed to, entered into a ſecond covenant at Perth, the laſt day of May, in the year 1559; and bound themſelves anew "to endeavour the putting "away of all things that diſhonour God's name; "and that they will not ſpare labours, goods, ſub-"ſtances, and lives, in maintaining the liberty of "the whole congregation and every member of it."

THE fears of the Queen regent's inſincerity were but too well grounded. As ſoon as ſhe had entered the town, her Frenchmen diſcharged their muſquets; the ſon of Patrick Murray, a zealous member of the congregation, was killed. When the Queen heard of his death, ſhe made a reply, which does no great honour to her feelings: "It is a pity it was not the "father; but ſuch is the will of fortune."* Contrary to the article of treaty about withdrawing her troops, ſhe left in the town a number of mercenaries to re-eſtabliſh the Romiſh ſuperſtition, and to overawe the reformers. When it was repreſented to her, that this was a breach of the treaty, ſhe replied that the article on that head related to French ſoldiers only. But the Proteſtants inſiſting, that thoſe were to be reckoned French ſoldiers who were in French pay, ſhe told them plainly, that the performance of promiſes was not to be exacted of princes with too much rigour: That no faith was to be kept with heretics: "Nay," added our Catholic heroine, "had "I as fair a pretext for the deed, I would not leave "an individual of the heretical tribe, either his for-"tune or his life." Her conduct proved too well her adherence to theſe maxims.

* According to Mr. Knox, a little before her death, the French troops having killed a number of the Scots and Engliſh in a ſkirmiſh at the ſiege of Leith, took the dead bodies and with the ſtupid wantonneſs of cruelty, laid them out, as public ſpectacles, upon the walls. "Charming ſight," ſaid the Queen regent as ſhe beheld them, "were all the fields between Edinburgh and Leith covered "with the ſame tapeſtry!"

SOME time afterwards, at St. Andrews she made a truce with the Lords of the congregation which was to continue for eight days; in which time she was to draw her soldiers to the other side of the Forth; and to send Commissioners to St. Andrew's, in order to treat with the Congregation concerning a peace. She withdrew the soldiers; but sent no Commissioners.

AFTER various changes in the Queen regent's affairs, at last on the 24th day July, she thought proper to agree with the Lords of the congregation, that as, on the one hand, the Protestants should have the free exercise of their religion, and no military force should be kept at Edinburgh; so, on the other hand, the Papists should not be molested on account of religion; the priests should be allowed to receive their dues, as usual, from the people; and no one should attempt pulling down any more churches, monastries, or other buildings consecrated to the purposes of the Popish religion.

As the Lords of the congregation had still nothing to expect, but that the Queen regent would seize the first opportunity that offered itself, to destroy them and their adherents; so they entered into a new bond suitable to their circumstances, for mutual defence, and for the maintainance of the true religion. In this they engage, that none of them should correspond with the Queen Dowager, either by letters or by word of mouth, without the knowledge and consent of the rest; and that as soon as a letter should come from her to any one of them, he should not delay to acquaint them all with it: a necessary engagement on account of the underhand methods that were taken to separate them from one another. This bond was subscribed at Stirling on the first day of August, in the year 1559.

THE Queen regent, sometimes on one pretence, sometimes on another, continued to harass the congregation. Having fortified Leith, she distressed

the whole country round by her French ſoldiers, who never ceaſed making excurſions and plundering wherever they came. The Proteſtants called in the Engliſh to their aſſiſtance. The Frenchmen were beſieged in Leith by the confederate army of the Scots and Engliſh amounting to about 8000. Mr. Knox hints that the French were 4000.

WHILE the ſiege was carried on with various ſucceſs, the nobility, the barons, and gentlemen profeſſing Chriſt Jeſus in Scotland, and ſeveral others that joined with them for expelling the French, entered into another covenant for reformation, called the laſt bond, at Leith. In this bond they promiſe, as formerly, to ſet forward, all they can, the reformation of religion, to haſten the expulſion of the French whom they call ſtrangers and oppreſſors of their liberty; to regard the common cauſe as the cauſe of every one of them in particular; and the cauſe of every one, being lawful and honeſt, as the cauſe of them all in general.‡ This bond was ſubſcribed on the 27th of April in the year 1560.

THE nation continued to groan under Popiſh tyranny, and under the oppreſſion of a foreign military force, till the death of the Queen regent; which happened in the 9th day of June in the year 1560.

AFTER the death of the Queen regent, all parties, Engliſh, Scots, and French, were deſirous of putting an end to the war. Accordingly, a peace was concluded ſoon after; and the French and Engliſh armies quitted Scotland. The parliament was immediately aſſembled to enquire into the ſtate of the nation, and to take the neceſſary meaſures both with reſpect to religion, and with reſpect to the ſe-

‡ A ſentiment which ſhews that our Reformers had the juſteſt views of the nature and perfection of ſociety, and of the obligations ariſing from it. The words here uſed, are perhaps the beſt definition, any where to be met with, of that ſocial liberty which ought to be ſo dear to every ſtate and to every church.

curity of their civil rights. A fuller parliament perhaps never met in Scotland. The ſubjects to be canvaſſed on this occaſion, and the objects to be ſecured were in the higheſt degree intereſting to all ranks of men; and therefore no wonder, that hardly a baron who had the leaſt claim to a ſeat, was abſent.

THE attention of the parliament was called to the conſideration of religion by a petition from the Proteſtants. The petition being conſidered, the parliament appointed the miniſters and the barons to draw up articles of the doctrine, which they reſolved to maintain, and which they wiſhed the parliament to eſtabliſh. That the miniſters and barons cheerfully executed; and within four days laid before the parliament, the ſum of Chriſtian doctrine, commonly called, the Scots Confeſſion of Faith. It was immediately approved and ratified. Two acts were likewiſe paſſed in favour of the reformed religion; the one forbidding the celebration of the Maſs; the other aboliſhing the Pope's authority in Scotland. Some objected to the validity of what was done by this parliament; becauſe the Queen was not preſent, nor any one to repreſent her, but in vain; for the readineſs of the people to receive its acts, ſhewed that it had the general conſent of the nation; which might well ſupply the place of the Queen's approbation in her abſence. It is prepoſterous to confine the generous efforts of a people toward eſtabliſhing a ſyſtem of liberty, to thoſe rules and forms which are applicable only to a ſettled ſtate of ſociety.

THUS was the Proteſtant religion eſtabliſhed in Scotland, when Mary, upon the death of her huſband, Francis II. came to the throne. In the beginning of her reign moderation ſeemed to prevail in her adminiſtration: and though ſhe continued to have the Popiſh worſhip in her own chappel, ſhe forbore perſecuting the profeſſors of the reformed reli-

gion, nor did she hinder them from avowing openly their endeavours to propagate the truth. But in 1569 she began to alter her conduct; and guided by the house of Guise, she was thought to have designed a mischief to the Protestant Interest; when holy providence which over-rules the wickedness of men to the good of his people, ordered it so that the assassination of Mary's favourite Rizio, the murder of Darnly whom she had advanced to share the royalty with her only eighteen months before, and her infamous marriage a very short time after to the Earl of Bothwell, the supposed murderer of her husband, falling out, occasioned the loss of all her influence and authority, and put it out of her power to hurt the church of God.

AFTERWARD Mary, while a prisoner in the castle of Lochleven, was forced to subscribe a deed, resigning her crown and kingdom to her son, and committing the administration during his minority, to the Earl of Murray. Encouraged by the example and authority of the good regent, as the Earl was generally called, the reformation was carried on without interruption. The church had her assemblies every year; order and government were established agreeable to the simplicity of the New Testament; the ministers of the word shewed a becoming firmness and freedom in bearing testimony for the truth, and in reproving sin. In a word, shedding light and comfort among her friends, and terror among her enemies, she began to *to look forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.*

IN the year 1680 and 1681, the greater part of the nation and those of the highest rank having embraced the reformed religion, the way was prepared for national covenanting. It cannot be denied that a father may bring his family, as Jonadab did the Rechabites, under obligations to any thing lawful, that is, which is consistent with their duty, and with

the liberty and welfare of ſociety. This obligation on the Rechabites from Jonadab's command, was not owing to the peculiar diſpenſation of religion under the Old Teſtament; for, dwelling in tents and abſtinence from wine, were things of a purely civil nature, and had no reference to the then ſtate of the church. But why ſhould we inſiſt; ſince we are daily witneſſes of parents bringing obligations upon their children in the ordinance of baptiſm; obligations, too, which are materially the ſame with thoſe of the covenants and confeſſions of the Proteſtant churches? Why, then, may not the greater and better part of a nation do with regard to the whole, what every Chriſtian parent is allowed to do with regard to his children?

POPULAR diſcontents ſhould ſeldom be quite overlooked by thoſe in authority; both becauſe they are generally founded in truth, and becauſe the meaſures that may be neceſſary for the removal of them, often prove in other reſpects, the moſt beneficial. James who was now about ſixteen years of age had taken a fondneſs for a young nobleman whom he had created Earl of Lennox: but the nobleman was a Papiſt. In order to ſatisfy the people who could not bear to ſee the king laviſh his favours upon an enemy of the reformed religion, Lennox made a public and ſolemn recantation of Popery in one of the churches of Edinburgh. But the jealouſies of the people were revived by a prevailing report that the Pope had granted diſpenſations to his votaries to ſay or ſubſcribe any thing, however heretical; provided they were ſtill attached in their hearts to the Papal intereſt. James underſtanding that, ordered one of his preachers to compoſe a ſhort Confeſſion of Faith in oppoſition to Popery, and particularly, to the above mentioned diſpenſations. Then was the National Covenant written; and ſoon after publicly ſworn and ſubſcribed by the king, and by his court and council. Eager to imitate the royal example,

and obedient to the direction of the Assembly in 1581, all ranks of people flocked to the taking of the Covenant.

THIS national covenanting was peculiarly seasonable; as, at that time, the most considerable of the Popish powers were generally known to have entered into a league for the extirpation of the Protestant religion.

JAMES had a strong aversion for Presbyterian government as being altogether unfavourable to the great object of his pursuit, absolute power; for experience tells us that presbytery and civil liberty must always go hand in hand. Hence he laboured to bring into the church a set of bishops, whom he might consider as his own creatures and obsequious dependents. Though the reformation was retarded by this circumstance; yet the assembly in the year 1592, having agreed upon the plan of church government by Kirk-sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and General Assemblies, obtained the establishment of it by an act of Parliament. Indeed the church continued to make some progress in reformation, till toward the end of the year 1596. In this period we have two instances more of Scotland giving herself to the Lord in solemn covenanting.

THE Lord having delivered our land with an outstretched arm from a Spanish Armada and other threatening dangers, our fathers expressed their gratitude to him who was their Saviour in the time of trouble, by renewing the National Covenant in 1590, subscribing along with it a general bond for the preservation of the Protestant religion and of the King's Majesty.

A rumour in 1596, of great war-like preparations which Philip of Spain was said to be making, filled the nation with apprehensions of an invasion. At the same time, the partial regard that James shewed to some Papists of the greatest rank and influence, led

many to fear the designs of the Popish party at home. The Assembly therefore having taken the state of the kingdom into consideration, appointed a day of public fasting: it proved a day much to be remembered for a plentiful out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, leading ministers, nobles, and burgesses to lament after the Lord, to acknowledge with many tears the breach of former engagements, and to enter anew into their solemn covenant with the Lord. This covenanting was conducted by the church alone without any mandate of king or of parliament.

But after this, the scene began to be changed. James's king-craft, his flattery, and his tampering with the consciences of men prevailed to turn many aside from a strict adherence to the purity of our Lord's institutions.

As on the one hand, a tame submission to a single instance of usurpation, however small it may seem, will only serve to allure an ambitious prince to attempt farther usurpations; so on the other hand, when ministers or other church-members fall into that snare which the fear of man bringeth, it is often long before they recover themselves out of it. Long indeed, and lamentable was the following train of incroachments on that freedom that Christ has given to his church, and on the simplicity and spirituality of that divine worship which he has appointed in his word.

James's first attempt was to restrain the freedom of ministers in testifying publicly against his own sinful practices: an intimation that he resolved from that time to suffer no controul in the pursuit of his schemes from the reproofs of God's word. Toward the close of the year 1596, he required the ministers (threatening them with the loss of their stipends, if they refused) to subscribe a bond acknowledging him the sovereign judge of treasonable or seditious expressions in their sermons. Though many had the

faithfulness to resist the temptation, yet there were not a few who complied.

IN the next place, he found means to have packed assemblies, in which all was carried according to his own heart. In one of these he got it ordained, that ministers should not meet for the exercise of church government and discipline without his consent.

AGAIN, he held out a very taking bait: he pretended it was a great loss to the church that she had no minister to represent her in parliament; to offer her petitions, and to see that no measure should be taken to her prejudice. The proposal for having some ministers chosen for that purpose was quickly passed into a law, and approved of by one of James's own assemblies. To the clergymen who by this law sate and voted in parliament, the king afterward gave the title of Bishops.

HE laboured to give them the power, too. A little after his accession to the throne of England, they were made constant Moderators in Synods and Presbyteries: but they became formidable indeed, when the two Arch-bishops of Glasgow and St. Andrew's were each of them, with some nobles and gentlemen, authorised to hold a court of high commission, and to excommunicate fine, and imprison all whose religious principles or manners were offensive to them. Episcopacy having tried all its trimming soothing arts in vain, now began to shake the dreadful dart of persecution.

AT length James carried his point so far, that his own absolute power in the church, and, which was entirely subservient to it, the power of the bishops were secured both by acts of parliament and by the oaths which ministers were required to take at their ordination.

FARTHER still: he attempted to introduce a number of superstitious ceremonies, under the colour of

an Aſſembly's appointment: The Aſſembly we mean, was at Perth in 1618; the members being moſtly the King's creatures, and Spotiſwood Arch-biſhop of Glaſgow the Moderator. Such was the meeting wherein were paſſed the famous five articles with regard to kneeling at the Lord's Supper, private communicating, private baptiſm, confirmation of children, and the obſervation of holy days. Theſe articles were afterwards ratified by an act of parliament.

Thus far had James advanced in the ſcheme of eſtabliſhing Epiſcopacy and arbitrary government in Scotland; when Charles ſucceeding to the crown, entered fully into his father's views, and proſecuted them with all the enthuſiaſm of a ſuperſtitious bigot.

By the time that Charles aſcended the throne, the pretence of introducing innovations by the conſent of General Aſſemblies was grown quite obſolete and thread-bare. All men ſaw that the king modelled theſe aſſemblies, and directed their proceedings in a manner contrary to the rights and the liberty of the church: ſo that their acts were diſregarded as of no force nor authority.* Charles therefore found it an uſeleſs expedient; and full of the grandeur and univerſal efficacy of his prerogative, he deemed it unneceſſary.

The following inſtance of his behaviour toward the parliament of Scotland deſerves our notice. While he was in Scotland in the year 1633, having called the parliament, he brought in two bills; one declaring his Majeſty's Sovereign authority over all eſtates, perſons, and cauſes whatſoever; and that the power of preſcribing an habit to church-men ſhould reſide in him and his ſucceſſors for ever: the other for the confirmation of all the acts and ſtatutes that had been made before with regard to the church.

* That many Preſbyteries, as well as particular miniſters, expreſly diſowned the authority and conſtitution of the ſeveral pretended Aſſemblies in this period, is ſufficiently demonſtrated in Mr. Wilſon's Defence, chapter iii. § 3.

THE members declared that so far as the first of the bills respected his Majesty's prerogative, they agreed to it; but they dissented from what was added about the apparel of church-men; as they apprehended it might open the way for introducing the surplice. But Charles would admit of no distinctions. "I must "have your yes," said he, "or your no to the "whole bill." The question being put, he marked the votes with his own hand. The clerk having counted them, declared that it was carried in the affirmative. "That we deny," cried some of the members. His Majesty then interposed, saying; "The clerk's declaration shall stand, unless one of "you will come to the bar, and at the peril of his "life, accuse me of falsifying the record of parlia-"ment." The truth is, it was carried in the negative, thirteen lords and the majority of the commons voting against it. Charles's treatment of the parliament would perhaps have passed unnoticed in the dark ages of ignorance and superstition; but by this time men had acquired too enlarged ideas of their natural rights and liberties, to suffer any flagrant violation of them without resentment.

AFTERWARD, he began to impose what he thought proper upon the church without troubling himself about the consent of parliament.

HE first sent down to Scotland a book of canons, commanding all arch-bishops, bishops, and others exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction, to see them punctually observed. These canons were designed to overturn altogether the Presbyterian constitution, and to form the church of Scotland entirely upon the model of the English church.

THE next point he laboured was to bring the church of Scotland to make use of a public liturgy or book of common prayer; the same as that used in England with a very few alterations. This roused the people effectually. While the accustomed forms

of worſhip were uſed in their public aſſemblies every Lord's day, the bulk of them were not ſo ſenſible of the deviations from the Preſbyterian order and from the liberty of the church in courts of judicature which they ſeldom have occaſion to witneſs. But the caſe was altered indeed, when inſtead of that ſimple manner of worſhip by which they had been edified, they were every Sunday (for ſo the Sabbath was called in the Liturgy) to have the ſame dull unvaried repetition of morning and evening prayer, of litanies, collects, leſſons, confeſſions, abſolutions, reſponſes, amens, creeds, and pater noſters. The clergy, therefore, no ſooner offered to make uſe of the King's Book of Common Prayer, than the populace took the alarm; all was uproar and confuſion. The diſcontents which ſome how or other had been ſmothered for about forty years paſt, now broke forth all of a ſudden into an irreſiſtible flame.

THIS tumult of the common people, which the better ſort of the Preſbyterians much diſapproved of,* was followed by a firm and perſevering but regular and deliberate oppoſition to the court-meaſures. A great many of the firſt rank joined in petitioning his Majeſty for a redreſs of grievances; particularly, that he would not inſiſt upon the uſe of the ſervice book in Scotland, till he received farther information of the matter. This humble ſupplication was anſwered in the beginning of the year 1638 by Charles's proclamation; wherein he takes it upon himſelf to vindicate the impoſing of the liturgy, and diſcharges the meetings of the nobility and gentry, under the pain of treaſon. After ſuch a proclamation it was found neceſſary to take more deciſive meaſures for carrying on the intended work of reformation. The noblemen, the gentry, the burgeſſes, the miniſters met in ſeveral rooms.† They reſolved upon renew-

* "Theſe unhappy and ungodly violences," ſays Principal Bailie in one of his letters, "hurt our good cauſe."

† Theſe were called TABLES.

ing the National Covenant. Without delay a writing was made out for that purpose. The writing consisted of three parts. The first was a copy of the national covenant: the next was a list of the various acts of parliament in favour of the reformation: the third was an accommodation of the covenant to the present circumstances, containing a disapprobation of the government of the church by diocesan bishops, and an engagement against the practice of the ceremonies which the court was now seeking to introduce into the worship of God. Such was the covenant so generally sworn and subscribed by all ranks in 1638. The subscription was begun in February, and spread in a very short time all over the kingdom. The people swore the covenant in most parishes with remarkable emotions, with many prayers and tears, all professing repentance and godly sorrow for their sins, especially for their breach of covenant with the Lord, in suffering the purity of his ordinances to be tainted by prelatical innovations.

THOSE who were witnesses of this covenanting, testified, that "the desire it wrought in the hearts "of his people approved it to be a special mean of "God's appointment for reclaiming the nation to "himself.

HERE civil pains did nothing. The ministers who administred the covenant used no other arguments to persuade persons to take it, than such as were drawn from God's words. Nay, so far were the ministers from desiring to force any into their covenant, that they refused to admit some to that privilege.‡

THE general truth, that it is lawful to bind ourselves by oath to maintain our profession of religion

‡ See Bailie's Letters, Vol. 1st, Page 66. Speaking of the subscription of the Covenant at Glasgow, he says, "All among us in-"cline to subscribe.—With many sigh a and tear by all that people "the oath was made.—The Forsythes have subscribed, and almost "all who refused before. Some they will not have their hands."

as agreeable to the word of God, seems to have been allowed by all parties at that time. Hence the writings of that period in defence of the covenant appear always to take this principle for granted; and are for the most part taken up in vindicating the things engaged to in the covenant.

HENCE too, the King on his part, proposed that the people should subscribe the National Covenant with a bond expressing their loyalty to him. This subscription was generally refused; some, however, by the marquis of Hamiltoun, were prevailed on to subscribe.

THE design of the King's covenant, as they called it, was to secure the office of diocesan bishops in Scotland; for, said the marquis, it must now be understood as it was by those who took it in 1581, when Episcopacy was in the church. But yet the greater part even of those who yielded to his solicitations, denied that they considered themselves as under any obligation from the National Covenant to favour Episcopacy. So vain was Charles's attempt to force the National Covenant into the service of his Bishops.

IN November 1638, met the famous assembly at Glasgow, the marquis of Hamiltoun being present as the king's commissioner. That assembly abolished the office of diocesan bishops, and the articles of Perth; annulled all the assemblies that had been held since James's accession to the throne of England; restored and improved the plan of order and discipline which had been agreed upon in the time of John Knox; and overturned at once the whole fabric of Episcopal hierarchy, and of ceremonies which both James and Charles had laboured so long and so zealously to build.

THIS assembly gave a memorable testimony to the freedom and independency of the church by continuing to sit, after the Commissioner in the

King's name had declared it diſolved; a circumſtance which, however many doubts and apprehenſions it occaſioned to ſome at that time, will reflect honour on the honeſty and faithfulneſs of the members to the lateſt poſterity.

When the aſſembly's humble ſupplication was read to his Majeſty, he anſwered: "They have bro-"ken my head; and now they offer to put on my "cowl."

Soon after he exacted from the Scotſmen at court an oath, renouncing the Aſſembly and the Covenant; an oath in which they likewiſe promiſed the King all the aſſiſtance in their power againſt their countrymen. And then he erected his royal ſtandard at York, to which all the nobles and gentry of England were commanded to repair in order to oppoſe the Scots, who were falſly repreſented as about to invade England. The Covenanters were now declared rebels, and nothing but war was thought proper for them.

In the proſecution of the war, Charles was very unſucceſsful; his mercenary troops were lukewarm in his cauſe; the people of England, now beginning to be animated with the opening proſpects of civil and religious liberty, were, many of them, ready to take part with the Scots. They all murmured at a war undertaken without money to carry it on, and without the conſent of Parliament.

On the contrary, the army of the Covenanters was wonderfully encouraged, believing that they were engaged in the Lord's cauſe, and that his hand was with them. And with them it remarkably was, for the Lord is near to all them that call upon him. In the hiſtory of mankind there is hardly to be found an example of ſoldiers being ſo diligent in the pure worſhip of God as the armed Covenanters were on this occaſion. One who had the leaſt real taſte for the exerciſes of religion would have been refreſhed to have heard morning and evening in the tents

through the camp, the delightful ſound of ſome ſinging Pſalms, ſome praying, and ſome reading the Scriptures. True religion is no enemy, like enthuſiaſm or ſuperſtition, to prudent counſel or undaunted valour. The Covenanters uſed all the proper means of defence with vigour and ſucceſs: Large ſums of money were raiſed; ſufficient quantities of arms were provided; men were regularly inliſted and diſciplined; the chief command was given to General Leſly, a man of unqueſtioned ability in military affairs; while the inferior officers were, many of them, ſuch as had acquired experience and reputation under the great Guſtavus Adolphus of Sweden. In ſhort, the Covenanters were ſo firmly united, and took their meaſures ſo juſtly, that Charles after having in vain attempted by a fair pretence of peace to deceive them into a ſecurity that might have rendered them an eaſy prey to his deſigns, found it neceſſary at laſt, to treat with them in earneſt. This treaty was begun at Rippon in the year 1640, juſt after the Scots had taken Newcaſtle. He had often declared the Covenanters rebels and traitors; but now he thought fit to acknowledge them before the Parliament of England (for he had now called a parliament) to be his good ſubjects, to whom he had ſent his great ſeal, and with whom he wiſhed to have a perfect agreement. The truth is, the members of that auguſt aſſembly, inclined many of them to favour the cauſe of the Scots from the beginning; but now, quite charmed with their brave reſiſtence, could not forbear murmuring even before the king himſelf, at the leaſt reproachful word uttered againſt the Scots. A preſage of the Union into which they and the Parliament of England ſoon after entered; an union in the cauſe of religion and liberty.

In the ſummer of 1641, the king having found the Engliſh Parliament ſo refractory, made a viſit to Scotland. Having reſolved, if poſſible, to win upon the affections of the Scots, he was now be-

come all goodneſs, and gave them whatever they aſked. He approved their proceedings in oppoſing the Book of Canons, the Liturgy, and the five articles of Perth. The bond againſt innovations and all the acts of the Scots-Parliament in favour of our covenanted reformation now received the royal aſſent: which gave them all the legal confirmation which they were capable of receiving.

Obſervations on the National Covenanting in Scotland.

LIBERIUS repreſents the Covenanters as "a "tumultuous combination inflamed with bi- "gotry for religious trifles, and without any reaſon- "able object." With regard to the approbrious name of tumultuous combination, the hiſtory of the Covenanters will enable the reader to judge how unjuſtly it is here applied. The popular inſurrections are out of the queſtion, ſince the Covenanters themſelves never offered to juſtify them either to the king or to their fellow ſubjects; though they may ſometimes have obſerved, that Providence over-ruled ſuch inſurrections (as it frequently over-rules the greateſt diſorders) to the moſt valuable purpoſes. To call a ſet of men of whom the leading part was highly diſtinguiſhed in rank, in education, in the love of religion and of their country, a tumultuous combination, while it is not ſhewn that they acted contrary to the principles of equity; to call ſuch a ſet of patriots by ſo reproachful an appellation, from the circumſtance meerly of their being in oppoſition to the king, is a baſe partiality which none will excuſe but thoſe whoſe ignorance of the rights of mankind fits them to receive the ſlaviſh doctrines of paſſive obedience and non-reſiſtance.

As to the reasonableness and importance of their object, if *Liberius* reckons nothing a solid or substantial possession but fine houses, well-cultivated lands, or some other kinds of external wealth; if he knows no satisfaction besides corporeal gratifications; if he cannot discern a reality in any thing beyond the sephere of his five senses; if Liberius is such a brute in human shape, * it must be owned that the matters our fathers contended for with respect to religion, never can appear to him other than mere trifles, unworthy the least attention. But some there are who know with the highest degree of certainty, that all their true happiness lies in communion with that God who made and who redeemed them, who supports the life of their bodies and of their souls. They are certain, that God's word and ordinances are the means of that communion; just as our food and raiment are the means of preserving the life and health of our bodies. Hence nothing is more reasonable than for such persons to contend earnestly for the purity of God's word and ordinances as the only appointed outward means, in this life, of attaining communion with God. Christians know that it is the life and consolation of their souls to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But God's word and ordinances are the glass through which they behold that glory; and can we wonder at their zeal for the purity of the glass which is the medium of such desirable contemplation? or can we blame them for refusing to have it sullied with the dirt of human inventions? Farther, those who are spiritual (we mean such as have the Spirit of Christ, for others are none of Christ's) discern a spiritual beauty and glory in the genuine institutions of Christ, entirely different from the beauty and glory of the most ingenious devices of men: The latter are adapted to the carnal eye of the natural man who cannot so much as apprehend the former; for *he receiveth not the things*

* Psal. xlix. 12. *He is like the beasts that perish.*

of the Spirit of God, they are fooliſhneſs to him, neither can he know them. Hence the manifeſt tendency of human devices in religious worſhip to turn away the attention and affections from God's ordinances. Beſides, the honour of our Lord's name is deeply concerned in the manner in which we worſhip him. To pretend worſhipping him by means which he has not appointed, is to offer him an indignity which the moſt pious intentions will never excuſe. But there are ſome to whom the honour of Chriſt as the king and head of his church is dear above all things. In fine, our fore fathers well knew that one deviation from the rule of God's word leads to another, and that to a third, and ſo onward to a total apoſtacy like that of the Romiſh church. If you admit one thing into the worſhip or government of the church, which is not mentioned in the word of God, another thing will ſoon occur that claims a place on the foot of tradition, of ancient cuſtom, of ſuppoſed uſe and ornament. Hence it was a godly jealouſy of our fathers that led them ſo vigorouſly to oppoſe the firſt appearances of unſcriptural rites and ceremonies of religion breaking in among them. If Liberius and his admirers reply, that this is the language of fanatics; we may aſk, what ſhould we ſay to a ſet of blind men who diſbelieving the teſtimony of others concerning the beauty of colours, ſhould agree together for their mutual comfort to call people that ſee fanatics?

THAT our anceſtors regarded the duty of public covenanting as an ordinance of the church is evident with reſpect to the National Covenant, from the immediate end of it, the reformation of religion; from the manner in which our divines wrote in defence of it, ſtill repreſenting it as a covenant with God and not with man only; from its adminiſtration by miniſters on the Lord's day, or on days of ſolemn humiliation; and eſpecially from the matter of it; in which we may take notice of the following particulars.

In the beginning of it we have these remarkable words strongly expressive of the profession that our fathers made of receiving the truth as it is in Jesus with faith and love: "We believe with our hearts, "confess with our mouths, subscribe with our hands, "and constantly affirm before God and the whole "world, that this only is the true Christian faith and "religion, pleasing God and bringing salvation to "man, which now is by the mercy of God, reveal-"ed to the world by the preaching of the blessed "evangel;—to which we willingly agree in our con-"sciences in all points as to God's undoubted truth "and verity grounded only upon his written word."

In the next place, our ancestors go on to specify the Popish errors which they solemnly renounced. In the present age the common people do not understand many of the terms here used. But we are to consider that church-members had occasion at that time to be much better versed in the Popish controversy, than they are now. It was only a few years before that they had themselves been practising the evils here abjured. Besides, they had been accustomed to hear their ministers laying open and refuting the errors of Popery almost every Lord's day. The confessions of faith too, and the religious treatises written at that time were, for the most part, taken up in exposing the abominations of Popery. Even in our own times, professors can give some account of the manifold sectaries which at present infest the church. And may we not suppose our forefathers (while yet far from that indifference to the concerns of religion which hath seized on this generation) to have been much better acquainted with that which was almost the only species of false religion against which they had then to contend?

Some think it strange that our forefathers should have mentioned the decrees made at Trent in a bond which the common people were to subscribe. But it should be remembered that the Council of Trent

was then a reigning subject of conversation, and as much in people's mouths as the Congress in America is now. We have reason to believe the Protestant ministers would give their people all the information about that council which was necessary for maintaining a testimony against it: They would shew them that whatever the Popish party might pretend, or whatever some of the well-meaning bishops that attended it might look for, the real design of that council was for the ruin of the Protestant cause, and for the confirmation of the errors and abominations of Antichrist. Such a testimony was absolutely necessary at that time, in regard that the Papists were continually boasting of their pretended general council, comparing it with the most venerable councils of antiquity; insisting that its decree ought to be held as binding upon all Christians; and charging the Protestants with inexcusable obstinacy, because they would not submit to those decrees. It was therefore, at that time a necessary branch of the testimony of Protestants, to abjure the authority of the Council of Trent.

FARTHER, That our ancestors meant that persons should take the National Covenant as church-members, is clear from the evangelical character which the Covenanters bear. They are persons "whose "God is the Lord: they are not moved with any "worldly respect, but are perswaded only in their "conscience; through the knowledge and love of "God's true religion imprinted in their hearts by "the Holy Spirit." It is only in the character of believers, or of those who partake of Christ and all his saving benefits, that we can give ourselves to the Lord in a covenant of duties: and surely it well becomes believers and partakers of Christ to use these words. At that time, there were no disputes among Protestants about the nature of faith. They unanimously held, in opposition to the general doubtsome faith of the Papists, that it is an application of

Chriſt and his benefits to ourſelves in particular; among which benefits is *the imprinting of the knowledge and love of the true religion by the Holy Spirit.* It is true, carnal men could not conſiſtently ſwear the National Covenant: nor can they conſiſtently pray or receive the ſacraments: for theſe and indeed every ordinance of the church of Chriſt muſt be obſerved in the way of depending on Chriſt as the Lord our righteouſneſs and ſtrength; a dependence to which natural men are abſolute ſtrangers. The truth is, if we are to reprobate a religious duty, only becauſe a deceived heart will be ſo abſurd as to draw falſe concluſions about the ſtate of perſons before God from the profeſſion that they neceſſarily make in ſuch a duty, what would follow? For the beautiful ſyſtem of Chriſtian duties and ordinances we would be preſented with an univerſal blank.

The Covenanters promiſe to abide by this profeſſion all the days of their lives, as they would not endanger "both ſoul and body in the day of God's "fearful judgment." Some ſuch imprecation is expreſſed or implied in all oaths. It is highly proper here, not that Covenanters were to entertain a ſlaviſh fear of hell; but becauſe the ground they here profeſs to ſtand upon is the only ground of our ſalvation; becauſe they might aſſure themſelves that the Lord would enable them according to his word to perform their vows; and laſtly, becauſe it expreſſes the deſire and reſolution to walk in the Lord's way, with which honeſt Covenanters ought to be animated.

Hiſtory

History of the Solemn League and Covenant of the three Nations.

THE manner of carrying on the reformation in England was very different from what it was in Scotland. In Scotland we have seen it advancing from the people to the prince; in England it proceeded or seemed to proceed in a contrary direction, from the prince to the people: a circumstance from which many important consequences followed. In England the reformation increased the king's prerogative; in Scotland the reformation limited the prerogative. In England, as the reformed church received her model in a great measure from the king; so the external administration of her government was left almost wholly in his hands: but the church of Scotland absolutely refused to acknowledge the will of any mortal, however exalted in rank, either with regard to her constitution, or with regard to the administration of her government. Scotland prosecuting more fully the spirit of the reformation, admitted nothing in religion, but upon the authority of God's word alone. England, stopping short in the middle of her career, chose a religion conformable to ancient customs, to the opinions of the fathers, and to the dictates of an earthly head. Hence the surplice, the ceremonies, the liturgy and the hierarchy: in all these the church of England savours rank of Popery.

FROM the beginning of the reformation there were many godly persons who complained of these things as greatly symbolizing with Antichrist, and as leading the people away from that simple and spiritual worship that God has appointed in his word. It is

well known how much the pious and faithful Bishop Hooper was against wearing the Surplice, calling it the Pope's Livery.

Queen Elisabeth, though celebrated as protectress of the reformed religion, used all her policy to increase the power of the crown in matters of religion. When princes want a religion that may prove subservient to their worldly grandeur, they always find the religion of the Bible too plain and simple for their purpose. Hence Elizabeth insisted so rigorously on the observance of a few ceremonies and glaring ornaments that were contrived to captivate the senses and imagination. Her successors James and Charles insisted no less rigorously.

Elisabeth's injunctions and persecution seemed to lessen the number of the non-conformists: but those of James and his son only increased it. How did this come about? The talents of the two princes for government were perhaps inferior to those of the Queen. But that was not all: As the knowledge of religion and liberty was daily gaining ground among the people, they grew more and more impatient of any arbitrary exercise of the royal prerogative, either with respect to religion or with respect to their civil rights. They would no more be treated like children; they rose to a more manly and vigorous use of their understanding. They began to bring every thing, even the mandates of the monarch, to the test of reason and of the scriptures. They shewed themselves to be men and to be Christians by choosing to obey God rather than man. At that time they did not embrace the truths of religion, as matters of speculation merely; but so much did they *receive the love of those truths*, that they were ready to do and suffer every thing for preserving the purity of them. Hence very soon after the meeting of the last parliament of Charles I. commonly called the Long Parliament, the general voice of the people of England appeared to be for the removal of Episcopa-

cy and unſcriptural ceremonies, root and branch; a fact which cannot be denied when one conſiders what petitions to that purpoſe ſubſcribed by ſo many thouſands were preſented to the parliament; how popular the long parliament was in all its proceedings againſt Epiſcopacy; and what a poor figure they made who followed the fortunes of the king, and who compoſed his pretended parliament at Oxford; a poor figure indeed, compared to the legal repreſentatives of the nation ſeconded as they were, by the joint efforts of their conſtituents. Charles muſt have been odious to the generality of his Proteſtant ſubjects, before he could have been forced into a meaſure ſo highly diſguſting to them, as that of calling in the Iriſh Papiſts to his help, a ſhort time after that dreadful maſſacre, and while their hands were ſtill reeking with proteſtant blood.

THE war between the king and the parliament fills ſome of the moſt intereſting pages of hiſtory: the one contending for arbitrary power in civil government, and alſo for Epiſcopacy and ceremonies in the church; the other for freedom from every ſemblance of deſpotiſm in the ſtate, and from every human impoſition in matters of religion. The ſucceſs of this, as of moſt other wars, was various. In the year 1643, the affairs of the parliament appeared to be verging toward ruin, when the reſolution was taken of ſending commiſſioners to invite the Scots to eſpouſe their cauſe. Theſe commiſſioners * arrived at Leith on the ſeventh day of Auguſt. Having appeared before the General Aſſembly which was then waiting to receive them, they preſented a declaration of both houſes of parliament, ſhewing the parliament's care of reforming religion; their deſire of having ſome members of the aſſembly to aſſiſt their divines who

* Their names were Sir William Armin, Sir Henry Vane, Mr. Hatcher and Mr. Darley; with two miniſters, Mr. Marſhal and Mr. Nye.

were now sitting at Westminster; and in fine, their extreme need of help in their present deplorable condition.

Some time before, the Scots had sent commissioners to the king at Oxford to offer their mediation between him and the parliament; but the offer was rejected, and the persons of their commissioners treated by those about him with all manner of contumely. Afterward he wrote to the Estates of Scotland discharging them to meddle in the affairs of England. Nothing could be more impolitic than the king's harsh and arbitrary treatment of the Scots at this time. It lost him their affections entirely, and determined them to accept the invitation of the English Parliament.

Hence it was that the before-mentioned commissioners from England, met with the kindest reception both from the assembly and from the estates. Some indeed were still for holding a middle course between the king and the English Parliament. But the reasoning of the eloquent Lord Warristoun placed the vanity of that opinion in so strong a light that it was very soon relinquished; and harmony in the resolution of assisting the English Parliament ensued. But still the mode or manner of their union with the parliament was a subject of debate. The English Commissioners proposed at first a civil league only: but the Assembly and the Estates insisted on having a religious covenant. The English Commissioners at length agreed to the latter; only they laboured to keep the door open in England to Independency; a reserve which no consideration could bring the Scots to approve. At last, two or three in private agreed with the English Commissioners upon a draught of that which was afterward called, "The Solemn League and Covenant." This proved satisfying to all. The three committees from the Estates, from the General Assembly, and from the Parliament of England, gave an assent to it, than-

which nothing could be more unanimous. When it came before the assembly one can hardly imagine a more affecting scene than it was to see the tears of pity and of joy that were shed by so many grave, wise and aged men on that occasion. Persons who had a real concern for the glory of Christ, were transported with the prospect of the three kingdoms (where civil discord had raged for many years, and where horrid war was continuing to mark her progress with ruin and with blood) uniting at such a time in the Lord Christ as their common head, and declaring themselves his willing subjects. Language is unable to express the gladness that arises in the heart of the Christian on seeing the enlargement of our Lord's kingdom; a gladness far greater than that of worldly men when their corn and their wine are increased. All the Presbyteries, the Universities and Parishes through Scotland were appointed to have a copy of this Covenant to be subscribed by their members: an appointment which was observed very universally; the Covenant being taken in this and the following year, every where through the nation.

WITH no less readiness and alacrity was the Covenant received at London. The divines at Westminster, the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament approved of it as soon as it was laid before them; and in a few weeks after, solemnly swore and subscribed it with great joy and many tears. The Parliament having ordained the Covenant to be sworn by all ranks through England, multitudes took it, rejoicing at the oath of God. The House of Commons ordered the Solemn League and Covenant to be read publicly in every church and congregation on every day of humiliation which was then once in the month. By the same authority every congregation was obliged to have a copy of the Covenant printed on a fair letter, hung up in a proper place within the church. Many of these copies remained till the Restoration. In short it seems to be one of

the cleareſt facts of hiſtory, that in England the better ſort and the generality of all ranks went into the Solemn League and Covenant.

About the ſame time, it was ſworn by the generality of thoſe in Ireland who took part with the Engliſh Parliament; which we have reaſon to think, were the greater part of the Proteſtants: for the countenance the king had giving to the Iriſh Papiſts, his accepting of three hundred thouſand pounds and other aſſiſtance from thoſe bloody men, had alienated the hearts of the Proteſtants from his cauſe and party.

It was not long that the reformation prevailed in England. The Weſtminſter Aſſembly indeed, framed an excellent Confeſſion of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechiſms. But the affairs of the nation were in ſuch confuſion, that nothing could be firmly eſtabliſhed. Preſbyterian church order was introduced; but the parliament that protected and that nouriſhed it, were ſoon overpowered by the independent and ſectarian party; who, having beheaded their Sovereign, cruſhed it before it had time to take root. For nearly ten years after, while Cromwell's arms were renowned and reſpected abroad, all was uſurpation and diſorder, eſpecially in religion, at home. Cromwel having uſurped the ſupreme authority in the ſtate; his example and his unbounded toleration having leſſened men's reſpect for public office in general, the land was filled with preachers without any regular call, and with prophets who ran unſent. Theſe popular haranguers whoſe qualifications were impudence unreſtrained by any degree of modeſty, and wild imagination undirected by any degree of judgment, who knew neither *what they ſaid, nor whereof they affirmed*, broached a vaſt number of new opinions more abſurd and more monſtrous than the hereſy of the Gnoſtics, or any other that ever diſturbed the Chriſtian church.

WHILE Sectarianism was thus overspreading England, the Scots renewed again the Solemn League and Covenant, as a mean of preserving them from the evils of the times. They renewed it in the way of acknowledging the breaches of it, and solemnly engaging to the duties opposite to those breaches. They did so in almost all the congregations of Scotland in December, 1648, with such a solemnity, and with such a mixture of joy and sorrow as became people entering into covenant with the Lord. They did so according to an act of the commission of the General Assembly for renewing the Solemn League and Covenant: which act of the commission was unanimously and heartily approved in a subsequent act of the Committee of the Estates of Parliament; a beautiful order constantly observed in the reformation of Scotland, the resolutions of the church going before, and the approbation of the state following. There is nothing in either of these acts like a disposition to force people into the covenant; not a syllable about fining or subjecting the refusers of the covenant to any sort of bodily punishment. On the contrary, the act of the commission cautions ministers against admitting to the renovation or subscription of the covenant, such persons as were excluded by some directions the commission had given on that head.

IN January following, the covenant was renewed by the Parliament of Scotland. The General Assembly that met in July, 1649, ratified all the Commission had done in directing the manner of renewing the covenant.

THE National Covenant and the Solemn League were both sworn by Charles II. when the Scots admitted him to the throne of his ancestors. One Mr. Douglas preached before the solemn transaction at Scoon: he shewed with great plainness and faithfulness the danger of breaking the Covenant; assuring the young king that the miseries of his family had

been all procured by his grandfather's breach of that solemn engagement.

THUS the covenanting of our fathers received all the confirmation that the higheſt authority of the nation could give it, as well as all the legal obligation which could ariſe from the general conſent of a free people.

ABOUT this time, many of the Iriſh Proteſtants renewed the Solemn League and Covenant. The Preſbytery of Bangor in the year 1649 declared that they and others had renewed the covenant. A repreſentation which was read in the ſeveral congregations of Iriſh Preſbyterians, againſt the proceedings of the ſectarian party with Charles I. avows the Solemn League as their Covenant. In the year 1662, no leſs than fifty nine miniſters, zealous covenanters in the Synod of Bellimenoch, refuſed to conform to Epiſcopacy; a ſtriking proof that the number of Iriſh Covenanters had been very conſiderable. *

BEFORE we conclude our account of this period, we would offer a remark which as it is founded in the moſt undeniable facts, ſo it ſerves greatly to recommend the practice of public covenanting. It is this; that the zeal of our fathers for the Covenants National and Solemn League was joined with a proportional concern for the purity of all the other inſtitutions of Chriſt; for ſtrictneſs of morals; for

* See Cox's Hiſtory, Vol. II. page 177, 180, &c. The Chriſtian loyalty of the Preſbyterians, particularly in Ulſter ſince their ſettlement by King James. Acts of Aſſembly page 151, 190, 191, 214, 217. See the facts collected from theſe authorities by Mr. Brown in his Letters on Toleration and the obligation of our Covenants, page 139, 140, 141, 142. Yet it muſt be owned, that whatever took place among the inhabitants of particular Counties, as in Ulſter where the preaching of the goſpel by Mr. Livingſton, Mr. Blair and others, was very ſucceſsful; yet as to the Iriſh in general, the greater part of them, being ſtill either Papiſts or Epiſcopals, were enemies to the work of God. So that the Aſſociate Synod had reaſon to ſay, in the Paragraph relating to Ireland added to the Acknowledgment of Sins, "The Covenanted Reformation "got very little footing and entertainment in that land, but the "truth and purity of goſpel ordinances were generally neglected."

true liberty civil and religious; in short, for all that is amiable or praiſe worthy among mankind. This concern was manifeſted in the commendable acts of the General Aſſembly and of the Parliament; in the due execution of the laws for the ſuppreſſion of vice and for the encouragement of virtue and religion; and in the godly and unblemiſhed lives of the moſt zealous and ſtedfaſt covenanters. And no wonder that it was ſo, ſince in all this they did no more than endeavour to proſecute the ends of our ſolemn covenants; the nobleſt ends that a reaſonable creature can have in view. Nay, the truth of this remark derives confirmation even from the reproachful epithets their enemies have commonly thought proper to give them: They have been called Puritans, becauſe they profeſſed to regard the pure word of God as their only rule; Fanatics for the fervency and frequency of their devotions; gloomy and moroſe for the ſeverity of their morals; and in fine, hypocrites; that while their enemies could ſee nothing to blame in their outward deportment, they might give full ſcope to fancy in ſuppoſing them guilty in ſecret of whatever crimes they pleaſed.

AFTER the year 1648, the diſputes ran high about the admiſſion of perſons to places of public truſt, who were known to be diſaffected to our covenanted reformation. Even many excellent men were for the admiſſion of them; being apprehenſive that the excluſion of all ſuch would divide their countrymen from one another; would deprive them of the ſervice of ſome whoſe abilities they could not be well without; and in ſhort would ſo weaken them that they would be unable to ſupport the oppoſition they were maintaining againſt the ſectaries: Plauſible reaſoning indeed, but then *it favoured not the things of God, but the things that are of men.* How often has the great enemy of the church made uſe of worldly policy and the fear of man to ſpoil the faireſt beginnings of reformation! Let hiſtory tell the fatal ſucceſs of the ſtratagem.

SINFUL meaſures, though directed by the moſt conſummate political wiſdom that we can ſuppoſe capable of ſuggeſting them, however conducive ſometimes they may appear to the intereſt of civil ſociety, are always contrary both in themſelves and in their conſequences, to the welfare of the church of Chriſt. Thoſe who were averſe from our covenanted reformation being once admitted to have a ſhare in the management of public affairs, gathered ſtrength inſenſibly, and became in a few years the prevailing party. Hence it was, that when Charles II. began to overturn the whole covenanted reformation, and and to ſet up Epiſcopacy again, he found little or no oppoſition from thoſe who took the lead in public affairs. When the motion was propoſed in the Parliament of Scotland in 1661, for annulling all the parliaments which had given any civil ſanction to the General Aſſembly at Glaſgow in 1638 or any after aſſembly, or which had ratified the Solemn League and Covenant and Preſbyterian church-government; when this motion was made and carried, there were ſcarcely forty members that appeared againſt it.

THE Solemn League and Covenant being declared unlawful, what cruelties were exerciſed in the courſe of this and the following reigns to make the people renounce their engagements to be the Lord's, nobody is ignorant. The generality complied, in one reſpect or another, with the impoſitions of government. A few, however, continued to keep the teſtimony of Jeſus; and *they loved not their lives unto the death.*

THOUGH our martyrs of this period may in a general way be ſaid to have ſuffered for Chriſt's alone headſhip over the church, and for her independency on the kingdoms of this world; yet the obligation of our covenants (in which theſe were included) was the leading point for which they ſuffered. It was this principally that enraged their perſecutors againſt them: On this they inſiſted much in all their teſti-

monies; ſtill repreſenting the other things they mentioned as what the whole nation was bound to by ſolemn covenant. The perſecution proceeded upon the act of parliament declaring the covenants in themſelves unlawful oaths; by which act the taking as well as the impoſing of the covenants is made treaſonable as "being againſt the fundamental laws and "liberties of the kingdoms." Hence people were not perſecuted, at leaſt not unto death, or according to law, for being Preſbyterians merely, but for being Covenanters.

Obſervations on the taking of the Solemn League and Covenant.

THE characters of thoſe who were actors in the covenanting of the laſt century have been much reproached in order to diſprove the lawfulneſs and obligation of our Covenants. Henry Vane it is ſaid, and the reſt of the Engliſh commiſſioners had no other intention in agreeing to the propoſal of a covenant for the reformation of religion than to flatter a religious people whoſe friendſhip was then become neceſſary to the Engliſh Parliament.

THIS objection might be ſufficiently anſwered by obſerving, that however we may judge of the characters of particular perſons by the views and motives (ſo far as we know them) with which they perform any duty, the nature of the duty itſelf muſt be diſcovered by other means. A wicked man will ſometimes do an action which is materially good and commendable. Here we judge the matter of the action to be good ‡ in oppoſition to the general charac-

‡ "Works done by unregenerate men may, for the matter of "them, be things which God commands, and of good uſe both to "themſelves and others."—Weſtminſter Conf. Chap. xxvi. Sect. 7.

ter of the man who does it, on account of its conformity to the law of God, the only rule of duty. In like manner, we are to examine how far the covenanting of our anceſtors was conformable to the word of God; how far it was a public acknowledgment of the Lord as our God; how far it was an engagement to cleave to his truths and ways; how far, in fine, it tended to the glory of God and the good of the church: ſo far and no farther ought we to approve of it; ſo far ſhould we conſider ourſelves as having covenanted in the loins of our fathers; ſo far in the account of God's word, the vow of our fathers is ours, and we are as much bound as they were, to pay that vow to the Lord. If our fathers went about public covenanting as a religious duty in a manner agreeable to the word of God, it is abſurd in that caſe, to ſuppoſe that the political views of any that joined in it, would change its whole nature and render it a merely political tranſaction. After all, it is not remembered that there is any proof of the charge implied in the objection, to hinder us from conſidering it as a baſe aſperſion on the memory of our anceſtors.

THAT the Scots were more ready to aſſiſt the Engliſh, when they ſaw them engaged in the ſame covenant of religion and reformation with themſelves, is true: But it does not follow that the covenanting of the Engliſh was "a mere political ſtratagem." We cannot always judge with any degree of certainty of the nature or moral quality of actions from the occaſions or conſequences of them. Suppoſe a very wicked perſon, having occaſion for the friendſhip of a good man, forſakes his vices and engages in a virtuous courſe of life; from the circumſtance alone of his needing at ſuch a time the friendſhip of the good man, we could not certainly conclude all his reformation to be mere pretence.

WHY ſhould we blame either the Engliſh or the Scots for what they did in this matter? What did

the Scots do to deserve our censure? Why, when the English desired their assistance, they put the English in mind of their obligations to the God of heaven, and advised them to perform a scriptural duty; a duty which was peculiarly calculated to promote zeal and unanimity in the cause wherein they were then engaged. And what did the English Parliament do to deserve our censure? They did what was plainly their duty: they complied with the Christian admonitions of the Scots; a compliance which far from being blameable, was worthy of great commendation; for a society as well as an individual *that hearkeneth unto counsel, is wise*, Prov. xii. 15.

WE may farther observe, that in subordination to the glory of God and the good of the church, it was by no means unlawful in framing such a league to have regard to the political welfare of both nations. The scripture proposes our temporal welfare as an encouragement to religious duties, Deut. xii. 6, 7. Matth. v. 5. James v. 14,—18. 1 Pet. iii. 10, 11. 1 Cor. xi. 30. Our temporal welfare then may well be a subordinate motive to the practice of a religious duty: and our ancestors were by no means blameable for having an eye in their covenanting to the preservation of their civil rights and liberties. Indeed, this duty had a tendency, from the very nature of it, to better the political state of these nations. They were much divided: The covenant was for uniting them to one another in the Lord. They were much weakened by civil broils and other calamities: the immediate design of the covenant was to strengthen them by restoring mutual confidence, by exciting all ranks to the duties of their respective stations, by recognising that relation to the Lord as their God which is the glory and the strength of any nation.

IN the present age, we think ourselves vastly more enlightened than our fathers. But posterity may be

of a contrary opinion. Our fathers contended earneſtly for the rights of the church, and the royal prerogatives of Jeſus againſt the incroachments of princes and of prelates: but the preſent generation ſeems to have practically given up ſome of the moſt eſſential rights of the church, either in compliance with the civil magiſtrate, or in conformity to the faſhionable opinions that make the ſyſtem of outward order, govérnment and diſcipline which Chriſt hath preſcribed unto the church, a mere thing of wax, varying continually to worldly intereſt, to aſpiring ambition, to popular humour. We have reaſon to fear, that when the Lord comes to build up Zion and appear in his glory, our boaſted ſuperiour lights as to the nature of Chriſt's kingdom will be found to have been, in a great meaſure, darkneſs; and the moſt part of the preſent generation will be diſcovered to have been deſtitute of the real practical knowledge of the glory, the excellency and purity of the church of Chriſt: while the zeal and faithfulneſs of our worthy anceſtors, cleared from every malicious aſperſion and miſrepreſentation, ſhall ſhine forth with diſtinguiſhed luſtre to the utter confuſion of Zion's enemies, but to the abundant conſolation of her children.

It has been ſaid, that the Lord gave teſtimony to the public covenanting of our anceſtors by remarkable effuſions of the Holy Spirit. In order to obviate ſome objections that have been made to ſo comfortable an evidence in favour of public covenanting, we ſhould take notice of the following circumſtances.

Firſt, In 1648, the Lord's people were led to ſet about public covenanting by a memorable outpouring of the Spirit of grace and ſupplication; which was continued and increaſed in that ſolemn work, agreeably to Iſa. xliv. 3, 4, 5. where covenanting is promiſed as a conſequence of the Spirit being given. Much leaven of corruption may remain in church-members amidſt the largeſt communications of the

the Spirit with which the militant church is favoured; but never did the Spirit introduce any of that leaven, or countenance the introduction of it. *Secondly*, The sanctification of the Lord's people was very sensibly advanced in and by their public covenanting. We must distinguish between those remains of sin and error which may be in those who experience the saving work of the Spirit, and those divine truths and ordinances which are the proper means of beginning and carrying on the saving work. Sanctification was never promoted by the Popish ceremonies retained in the church of England, nor by the carnal fancies about consubstantiation held by the Lutheran churches; though, no doubt, many saints have been, and we hope still are in those communions. But the Lord's gracious presence was eminently with his people in the very act of public covenanting, bringinging them to godly sorrow for sin, filling their hearts with love to Christ and to one another in him: and those who were witnesses of it testified, that "the desire of true knowledge "wrought by it in the hearts of the people approved "it to be a special mean appointed by God for re-"claiming the nation to himself." It is well known that it was when gospel-ordinances in general, were signally accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power, that church-members were led forward to join in public covenanting. The more zealous that Christians were for covenanting they were generally the more lively and spiritual in other duties. But the reverse of all that, is true with regard to will-worship and the commandments of men; which are *lies, vanity, and things wherein is no profit*. *Thirdly*, That effusion of the Spirit which our fathers experienced when they were enabled to give themselves to the Lord in a covenant of duty, had permanent effects on the hearts and lives of church-members. Multitudes of these Covenanters to the day of their death continued thanking the Lord for

his kindneſs in that ordinance, and having a converſation every way becoming the goſpel of Chriſt. Nay, the Lord was pleaſed very ſoon to put his own work to the trial, by the furious perſecution which he permitted ſoon after to break forth, and to rage for about the ſpace of twenty-eight years. Then was the fine gold of a teſtimony for the duty of covenanting tried and brought to the light: a teſtimony which the witneſſes held in ſo rational and ſcriptural manner that their adverſaries with all their malice, were unable to gainſay or reſiſt it: and the witneſſes ſealed it with their blood. Thus what the Lord wrought for our fathers by the outpouring of the Spirit which attended covenanting-work, was altogether unlike the impreſſions of Enthuſiaſm, which are wont to paſs away like a land flood. *Fourthly*, In conſequence of the effuſion of the Spirit that we ſpeak of, the Lord's people had very clear views of the ſcripture warrants for covenanting; ſo clear that rather than deny it, they choſe to part with all they had, and even with life itſelf. It is hard to ſuppoſe that ſincere Chriſtians could ever pretend to ſee clearly any mere invention or commandment of men to be (what our fathers profeſſed they clearly ſaw public covenanting to be) an ordinance which God hath expreſly appointed in his word. It is true, charity obliges us to look upon many who have written in defence of the unſcriptural ceremonies uſed in the church of England, as good men and eminently uſeful in their day: Yet it deſerves our conſideration, that the beſt and moſt judicious of thoſe writers, ſuch as Dr. Stillingfleet, have conſidered them as in themſelves matters of indifference, tho' venerable for their antiquity. Nay ſome Preſbyterian divines have abundantly confuted the Epiſcopalians by collecting paſſages from their own eminent writers. But the miniſters and other church-members of the laſt age who obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful, our martyrs particularly, were of one mind, of one judgment, of one full aſſurance with regard to the

warrantableneſs and perpetual obligation of our covenants, as grounded on the word of God. "I do "judge", ſaid Mr. Rutherford a little before his death, "and in my conſcience believe, that no pow- "er on earth can abſolve and liberate the people of "God from the bonds and facred ties of the oath of "God." "I do bear witneſs," ſaid Mr. James Guthry in his laſt teſtimony, "to the National Co- "venant of Scotland, and to the Solemn League and "Covenant of the three nations: theſe ſacred ſolemn "oaths of God, I believe, can be looſed or diſpen- "ſed with by no perſon or party or power upon "earth; but are ſtill binding upon theſe kingdoms, "and will be hereafter for ever, and are ratified and "ſealed by the converſion of many a thouſand ſouls, "ſince our entering thereinto." So likewiſe ſaid all our martyrs.

IT is objected, that our forefathers were as much for the uſe of civil penalties in matters of religion as for the duty of covenanting.

THAT they did not ſufficiently guard againſt all appearance of ſuch uſe of civil penalties is granted; but that they held it as explicitly and unanimouſly as the duty of covenanting, is utterly denied. No one wrote or ſpoke more againſt the Independent notions (which, to be ſure, were very looſe and indigeſted notions) of toleration than Mr. Rutherford; and yet hear how Mr. Rutherford laments, inſtead of defending, the uſe of civil penalties in matters of religion: "Our work in public," ſays he, "was "too much in ſequeſtration of Eſtates, in fining and "impriſoning, more than in a compaſſionate mourn- "fulneſs of ſpirit toward thoſe whom we ſaw oppoſe "the work of God."* The proceedings which occa-

* See his Teſtimony ſubjoined to his Letters. Mr. Wilſon, in his Defence, doubts whether this paper be Mr. Rutherford's: as it did not come out till 1713; and was neither ſigned by Mr. Rutherford, nor atteſted by any of his acquaintance: yet that very candid and judicious writer ſeems to approve of what is here ſaid as pointing at 1650 and the following years.—Mr. Wilſon's Defence of the Reformation, Chap. 7. Sect. 3.

ſioned this complaint were after the year 1649, when the reformation was going to decay. We do not remember to have met with a ſyllable in any of the teſtimonies of our martyrs in favour of the opinion, that a religious profeſſion is to be inforced by civil penalties. We are certain that it is never laid down, like the obligations of our covenants, as a diſtinct head for which any of them ſuffered. It is, therefore, a vile reproach that ſhall be wiped away by him who will effectually ſtop the mouth of thoſe that ſpeak lies, to repreſent the teſtimony of our worthy forefathers as no leſs for the uſe of civil pains in matters of religion, than for the obligation of our covenants. They were ſilent of the former; but for the latter they witneſſed uniformly even unto death.

We are to diſtinguiſh between the teſtimony of our martyrs and the reaſoning they uſed in ſupport of it: a diſtinction that is made uſe of in every cauſe that comes before a court of juſtice. Their teſtimony conſiſted in the precious truths of God's word; but their reaſonings belonged to their imperfect manner of defending thoſe truths. They had clear, ſpiritual, ſcriptural views of the ſeveral heads of their teſtimony: But we dare not ſay, that all their apologies were free of miſtakes; ſome of the reaſons, for example, which they aſſigned for caſting off the magiſtrates authority we may allow, if taken ſingly and alone, to have been inſufficient. They were men of like paſſions as ourſelves; and we are to regard ſome of their reaſonings as rather dictated by their feelings than by their ſettled judgment. But out of weakneſs they were made ſtrong: they were enabled to confirm the obligation of our covenants, and all the other heads of their teſtimony by ſuch a ſtrength of argument as none of their adverſaries have been able to invalidate.

Nor are we to deem lightly of the teſtimony of martyrs. So far as the grounds and manner of their ſuffering are conformable to the precepts, prophe-

cies and examples of the word, their martyrdom is an evidence in favour of the doctrine for which they suffer. When we see men remarkable for their uniform regard to all the truths, laws and ordinances of Christ as they are laid down in his word; when we see them evidencing, on all occasions, the greatest aversion to every appearance of making their own will, the will of others, or any thing indeed besides the scriptures of truth the rule of their conduct and religious profession; when we see manifold consistent, scriptural evidences that they have the special supports of the Spirit of God under their sufferings; we cannot persuade ourselves that heaven would bring about all this, only to put a seal to falsehood; or while the general tenor of their conduct and profession is uniformly agreeable to the word, that the matter which is a principal object of their consideration, and of their incessant prayers, and on account of which they are led under the good hand of God to lay down their lives, should, alone, be contrary to the word; and that this should be the case, not merely of one or two individuals whom we may suppose to have been of a temper peculiarly susceptible of enthsiastical impressions, but that it should be the case of multitudes of various dispositions and turns of mind, multitudes who having been sober and regular in their lives, were remarkable for composure and firmness of mind, and for sobriety in all their words and behaviour amidst the studied provocations of their enemies, and when meeting death in its most shocking forms. These things are so conspicuous in the history of the witnesses for our covenanted reformation as must for ever distinguish and set them above a comparison with the most celebrated Popish zealot or Quakerish enthusiast.

WE do not mean to consider the example or sufferings of our martyrs as the ground of our belief, that public covenanting is God's ordinance; the

word of God is the only ground of our belief. We only mean to shew that this is exactly like the other truths and institutions of Christ in the effects it has upon those who receive the love of it. It is an argument from analogy.

It is a common objection to the obligation of our covenants, that they were enjoined under civil penalties. But besides that it is a Protestant principle in opposition to Jesuitical equivocation, to hold the obligation of an oath, even when persons are compelled to take it, if it be otherwise lawful and proper; besides that a circumstance of this kind, cannot reasonably be supposed sufficient to take away the validity of a divine ordinance; though we grant that probably there was too much reason for Mr. Rutherford's lamentation which we have mentioned, and that sometimes civil penalties were too much employed in pressing people to take the covenants; yet a tolerable degree of candour in perusing the history of our ancestors would lead us to excuse, or at least to extenuate their fault, when it appears that the generality of the refusers of the covenants were their professed enemies both in church and state: we do not find that any refused the National Covenant who were hearty friends to the reformed religion; or the Solemn League either, except those who laboured all they could, to disappoint the generous efforts of the Long Parliament in favour of liberty and of reformation.

Though the Parliament of England enjoined the taking of the Solemn League and Covenant under civil penalties, it does not follow that the covenant was not taken voluntarily; because were we to admit such a consequence, there could be no voluntary or willing obedience to any law human or divine. Besides we know that a spirit of zeal for religion was the ruling character of those times; so that we have reason to think people were generally persuaded to take the covenant, rather by the arguments which the mi-

niſters of the goſpel (who adminiſtered that ſolemn oath) held forth from the word of God, than by any threatening of confiſcation in the act of parliament. A farther evidence of this is, that we hear of no meaſures being taken for putting the penalty in execution. Add to all theſe circumſtances, the many accounts we have of particular perſons, pariſhes and large aſſemblies willingly and chearfully going into the covenant.

IT is objected, that the diſputes between the Preſbyterians and the Independents both in the Long Parliament and in the Weſtminſter Aſſembly ſhewed the former to be enemies of toleration. Now it was the Preſbyterians that ſet on foot and carried on the ſubſcription of the covenant.

WE anſwer, that if we duly conſidered the toleration which the Independents pleaded for, we would be thankful that the Preſbyterians did not give into it. The Independent was a poſitive toleration; a toleration which is no leſs contrary than perſecution itſelf to the liberal principle on which we plead for a negative, that is, the only reaſonable toleration. The principle we mean is this; that it does not belong to the civil magiſtrate to judge authoritatively in matters of religion. No doubt, he ought to encourage what he takes to be the true religion; nay, his authority may be employed to ratify the ſpiritual judgments, ſo far as he approves them, of that church which he reckons the true one: Such ratification may be conſidered as binding upon all that are willing members of that church, while they continue ſo. But ſuch ratification ſhould have no more effect with regard to others, than to hinder them from giving the church or her members any moleſtation in obſerving the ſpiritual judgments that are ſo ratified. Such is the rational foundation on which negative toleration ſtands. On the contrary, the independent authoritative toleration ſuppoſes that the magi-

ſtrate, having eſtabliſhed one religion as the true, is to take cogniſance of other religions; and having determined them to be falſe and wrong, is however, to tolerate, or rather to countenance them under the very conſideration of their being falſe and wrong religions. According to the Independent ſcheme of toleration, therefore, the civil rulers as ſuch, are to judge in matters of religion, and to oblige all their ſubjects, and not only thoſe of one communion, to acquieſce in their judgment; which judgment and obligation are both of them contrary to the above mentioned principle.

While we thus condemn the looſe notions of the Independents, we dare not ſay that our Preſbyterian divines ſteered always clear of narrow and intolerant principles. However, were the matter ſearched to the bottom, we hope that making proper allowances for too ſtrong expreſſions which it is difficult to avoid in controverſy; and for the variety of civil and religious concernments which were ſo much blended together in the cauſe they were engaged in againſt the abettors of Charles's arbitrary meaſures, they will be found to have been, at the bottom, as much enemies to perſecution as any of our own times.

So much for the objections againſt our covenants taken from the character and ruling principles of our anceſtors. We would now offer a few obſervations that may obviate ſome exceptions which are commonly taken to the articles of the Solemn League and Covenant. It has been objected concerning the whole matter of this covenant, that it is ſo various and intricate that the bulk of the common people who entered into it, could not be ſuppoſed to underſtand it.

But it is evident that an oath is not to be blamed, becauſe perſons may ſwear it raſhly and ignorantly. Full well is an oath accommodated to the underſtandings of thoſe who are deſired to enter into it, if the terms have ſo much preciſion as not to be am-

biguous; and so much clearness that any person of ordinary capacity, in the due use of the means he has access to, may come at the meaning of them. But the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant are neither hard nor ambiguous. The hardest are the names of the ecclesiastical officers in the Episcopal communion: and, why will some say, are we obliged to acquaint ourselves with all the branches of Prelacy? We should be acquainted with public evils, so far as the knowledge of them is necessary for the keeping of ourselves unspotted from them, that we may not be partakers of them; as is necessary in order to the exercise of gospel mourning and humiliation for them as grounds of God's controversy with the land; as is necessary in order to our testifying against them for the glory of God, and for the benefit of our fellow men. On these accounts, a great part of God's word is taken up in pointing out public evils. On these accounts, we should study to understand the terms alluded to in the Solemn League and Covenant.

WHOEVER is in the least acquainted with the history of this period, knows that the public attention was then much engaged by the various branches of Prelacy: So that it is reasonable to suppose the several orders of the Episcopal hierarchy and other things relating to that controversy were better understood among the people than they are now.

BUT is it actually true that I do not so understand the things mentioned in an oath as to be able to swear it falsely, till I have considered these things in all the lights wherein they can be considered, till I am able to explain each of them fully, and to solve all the doubts and difficulties that may be raised about them? For example, supposing I had a call in providence to assure the public by an oath of my loyalty to the British government, and supposing the words *British Government* to be in the form of the oath, would it be unlawful for me to swear it, till I comprehended

fully the nature and maxims of that government; till I understood how exactly the three branches of the Legislature were balanced together; how privilege and prerogative went hand in hand; and in fine how easily every objection might be answered against the commonly received opinion, that it is the best constituted government in the known world? Suppose I were called to swear that I remember I was in my usual state of health at such a particular time; would it be wrong for me to take an oath to that purpose with the word *health* in it; unless I could give an account of all the parts external and internal of my corporeal frame; unless I could tell of the solids and of the fluids; of the veins, arteries, nerves, muscles, tendons, glands; of the motion of the heart and of the lungs; of the chyle, the blood, and some mysterious thing they call the animal spirits; and in short, unless the word health suggested to me all the ideas which it ever suggested to a Sydenham or a Boerhave? If this is the case, I may turn Quaker when I please with regard to oaths; for it is impossible that ever in this world an oath can be devised that is not far beyond the reach of my understanding. Such is the egregious trifling which some have tried to pass upon the world for sober solid reasoning against our covenants. The truth is, one understands the things mentioned in an oath sufficiently for the purpose of swearing that oath, if his knowledge of them answer the intention of the administrator. One may take an oath of loyalty to the British government, though he knows no more of the British government than that he lives securely under it, enjoying his liberty and his property. In like manner, one may take an oath renouncing Popery, Prelacy and Arminianism; if he only knows a few of the tenets to which those names are commonly appropriated, and is convinced in his conscience that the tenets are contrary to the word of God. The divine truths opposite to Popery, Prelacy and Arminianism are such

as every Chriſtian ought to be acquainted with as contained in the holy ſcriptures: and ſurely it requires very little hiſtorical knowledge to convince him that there is ſomething contrary to thoſe truths in the religious opinions that go under the abovementioned names. The truth is a good and honeſt heart (that is the new heart which God hath promiſed) is unſpeakably more neceſſary for the right performance of this duty, than much of what paſſes among men for knowledge and penetration.

SOME have objected to the obligations in the Solemn League with regard to the ſtate: The Covenanters, for example, engaged to preſerve the rights and privileges of parliament; while, ſay they, theſe rights and privileges were not ſufficiently aſcertained.

So ſay ſome of our modern hiſtorians who, it ſeems, with all their parade of learning and improvement can trace the civil liberty of Britons no farther back than the Long Parliament: thus repreſenting that parliament as the author of the greateſt of political bleſſings (beyond their intention ſurely; for otherwiſe they caſt the vileſt reproaches upon that parliament) whereas we have reaſon to believe that a moderate acquaintance with the records of our native country would convince us that the Long Parliament only endeavoured to correct abuſes, to clear away the ruſt which the conſtitution had gathered in length of time, and to ſettle the ancient liberty of the people on a firm foundation. Farther, ſeveral of the rights of parliament, ſuch as that of granting the people's money, were then conſidered as clearly aſcertained. After all, this may be taken, in a general ſenſe, as an engagement to maintain the rights of the ſubject againſt the incroachments of the crown; an engagement no way unbecoming the Chriſtian; ſince the love of liberty is the love of human happineſs, and wherever it has flouriſhed, has been ſeen to lead every active and ſocial virtue in its train.

It is true, the people of Britain entered into the Solemn League and covenant at a time when they were ſtruggling for their civil rights and privileges; they looked upon public covenanting as a ſuitable mean of promoting unanimity in the common cauſe. In like manner, any providence or any ſituation may be a mean or occaſion of ſtirring up a perſon or people to any other religious duty, or ſpiritual exerciſe which that providence or that ſituation may call for. Hence it is that ſo much of the Covenant relates to the ſtate of the body politic. But that circumſtance does nothing to make it a mere political conſtitution. We may lawfully take our ſecular concerns into prayer or any other religious duty without leſſening the ſpirituality of the exerciſe. The Holy Ghoſt enjoins us to do ſo; *Acknowledge the Lord in all thy ways.* Surely as we may pray to be enabled, ſo we may come under engagements, to be faithful to the Lord, and to one another in him in our civil as well as in our religious tranſactions. The Chriſtian character ſhould be kept up in the market as well as in the church, in the parliament as well as in the aſſembly of divines. He is as far from behaving like a Chriſtian who barters the liberties of a nation for places and penſions, as he who ſeeks the advancement of Popery or of Arianiſm.

In the ſixth article of the Solemn League and Covenant our anceſtors "engage to endeavour the diſ-"covery of all ſuch as were incendiaries, malig-"nants, or evil inſtruments, by hindering the refor-"mation of religion, dividing the king from his "people, or one of the kingdoms from another, or "making any faction or parties among the people "contrary to the League and Covenant." This has been complained of as contrary to the right of private judgment.

The general deſign of the article ſeems to be included in the duty which the apoſtle exhorts us to in Rom. xvi. 17. *Now, I beſeech you brethren, mark*

them who cauſe diviſions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. It is undoubtedly our duty to diſcover the real character and deſigns, as far as we know them, of every enemy either to the church or the ſtate. Such diſcovery is always neceſſary for the welfare, and ſometimes for preſerving the very being of ſociety. It is neceſſary that every member of a ſociety and his actions, as far as they affect the public intereſt, ſhould appear in their true colours and without any diſguiſe, to the end that the ſociety may know its friends from its foes: And that is what our anceſtors, in this article, promiſed their endeavours to bring about.

IT is added, as the end of ſuch diſcovery, that incendiaries, malignants, and evil inſtruments, behaving in the manner before-mentioned, "might be "brought to trial, and receive condign puniſhment, "as the degree of their offences ſhall require or de-"ſerve." Since the crimes here mentioned, ſuch as dividing the king from his people, or one kingdom from another, were puniſhable by the laws of the land, the obvious meaning of this is, that Covenanters by making ſuch diſcovery were to promote the due execution of the laws; a motive that ought to have great weight with every one, whether he is conſidered as a member of the church or of the ſtate. No ſociety can exiſt without laws; and the uſefulneſs of laws depends upon the execution of them.

IT ſeems indeed to be the intention of this article, that the real enemies to that reformation in church and ſtate of which covenanters bound themſelves to ſeek the advancement, might be diſcovered; that individuals who came under the deſcription of ſuch enemies ſhould be taken notice of; that the civil powers ſhould forbear ſhewing them any particular favour or countenance; and that if their enmity broke forth into the commiſſion of crimes puniſhable by law, they ſhould be puniſhed accordingly. But

how does this infringe the right of private judgment? Surely the right of private judgment is not a right to lay plots for defeating a people's virtuous endeavours to promote religion and the public welfare.

After all, when we contend for the lawfulness of our covenants, and for the obligation of them on posterity, we do not mean that the form of words our ancestors made use of, is above all exception, or absolutely without a fault; for that would be to put it on a level with the inspired writings. The point we aimed at is made good, if it appears from the form of words in question, that our ancestors practised the duty of covenanting agreeably to the rule of the word, that they avouched the Lord to be their God, and engaged to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments; if it appears that they made some advances in reformation, and that they bound themselves and their posterity to hold fast what they had attained, and to carry on the good work which was begun: things which we hope are abundantly clear from the survey we have taken of our covenanting periods. We do not consider the Covenants, Creeds, and Confessions of the church as any other than the imperfect, though honest and faithful endeavours of church members who have led the way to us in keeping the word of Christ's patience. If it is the manifest scope and tendency of any article of a covenant, of a creed, or of a confession to hold fast something of truth and duty in opposition to the malignity of sin and error, we are, by no means, to drop such an article for the sake merely of inadvertent expressions,

——*Quas aut incuria fudit,*
Aut humana parum cavit natura.

On the whole, whether we consider the matter of our covenants, the manner in which our ancestors entered into them, or the concurrence of all ranks in the transaction, we can find no solid reason to doubt of their obligation upon us. Nor ought we to overlook the evidences in the course of providence

that the Lord has a controverſy with theſe lands for their breach of covenant with him. Beſides all that miniſters and others have been lead to teſtify on that head, we have been reproved by famine, particularly a little after the revolution; by remarkable burnings in Edinburgh and London where our covenants had been publicly burnt; by wars not only abroad, but alſo at home in the two rebellions in favour of a popiſh Pretender; and, which ought to alarm us more than all theſe, by the dreadful progreſs of ſpiritual judgments. The aſpect of providence is growing every day more gloomy: Our Colonies have deſerted us; our other allies are about to do the ſame. Alas, we are juſtly forſaken by our friends, becauſe we have forſaken the Lord and his covenant. Amidſt all theſe things, the generation is growing more careleſs and ſecure. A ſenſe of God and of duty is wearing off men's minds. As we have caſt off the obligations of our covenants, ſo we are loſing by degrees even the advantages ariſing to civil ſociety from religious obligation in general: charters, in which the public faith of the nation is pledged, have been too little regarded; oaths, particularly thoſe to the ſtate, are looked upon as mere forms, and in ſome caſes the breach of them has been apologized for as conſiſtent with virtue and with honour; men having got almoſt entirely free from the reſtraints of conſcience and regard to a future ſtate, are growing blind even to their preſent intereſt, and ſeem to be hurrying faſt away to perſonal and political deſtruction in the impetuous current of luxury and diſſipation. And if the land at laſt become deſolate, the following paſſage of ſcripture will be exactly applicable to our caſe: Deut. xxviii. 34, 35. *All the nations ſhall ſay, Wherefore hath the Lord done this unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men ſhall ſay, Becauſe they have forſaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.*

Of the Public Covenanting in the Seceſſion.

THE eſtabliſhed church of Scotland having neglected ſeveral opportunities of ſetting about this neceſſary duty, are going on to this day in a courſe of backſliding and corruption. Thoſe in the Seceſſion aiming at the revival of religion, endeavoured to guard againſt that neglect; and remembering how much the Lord had bleſſed and countenanced the practice of public covenanting for furthering the reformation in the days of our fathers, reſolved to ſtate themſelves as witneſſes for Chriſt in the way of giving themſelves publicly to him in that duty. Accordingly the Aſſociate Preſbytery agreed upon a bond and an acknowledgment of ſins; having both of them a particular reference to the ſins and errors of our own times. The Preſbytery found it their duty to call and beſeech all ſorts of perſons through the land, and particularly thoſe in communion with them, to turn from ſin to the Lord, and with their whole heart, to renew their covenant engagements to the moſt High God.

THE miniſters of the Seceſſion led the way in this work. In December 1743, the four brethren who were firſt thruſt out of the Eſtabliſhment, with eleven others, publicly ſwore and ſubſcribed the bond at Stirling before a numerous congregation. In March following, five more entered into that ſolemn engagement at Falkirk. The example of the miniſters was followed by the people in two or three congregations ſoon after. But the breach among the members of the Aſſociate Synod occaſioned ſome interruption of the good work. After that ſevere trial, ſuch as held faſt the Seceſſion teſtimony have been

gradually coming into the bond for the renovation of our covenants.

THIS renovation consists chiefly in the three following things; in acknowledging the obligation of our covenants, in confessing the breaches of them, and in a particular application of our covenants to the present circumstances.

IN the first place, we acknowledge the obligation of our Covenants National and Solemn League; agreeably to these words in the before-mentioned bond: "In regard we are taught by the word of "God, and bound by our Covenants National and "Solemn League." We have already taken notice that such an acknowledgment of the continuing obligation of the covenant which the Israelites entered into at Sinai, is evident in the after instances of their covenanting. One principal end of our public covenanting, which is to hold fast what the church has attained, requires this acknowledgment. Besides, the respect that our covenanting has to that of our fathers is necessary as an acknowledgment and approbation of the respect which their covenanting had to us. Nor indeed, while the renewing of our covenants is disregarded, can there be any adequate or suitable approbation of them, especially by those who profess to testify against the corruptions of the times and to set forward in reformation. Our ancestors made such a profession in the way of public covenanting. Surely then to shew the sincerity of the commendations we bestow upon their covenanting, we should make the same profession in the same way. Besides, when our ancestors brought their children under such obligations to be the Lord's people, they meant that their children should likewise willingly and chearfully take the same obligations upon themselves.

SECONDLY, When we join in the bond for the renovation of our covenants, we confess the breaches of those sacred engagements; breaches of them

not only in the present but in the former generations. This is implied in the following words of the bond: "By the Lord's grace we shall, according to our several stations, places and callings, contend and "and testify against all contrary evils, errors and corruptions; particularly, Popery, Prelacy, Deism, "Arianism, Arminianism, and every error subversive of the doctrine of grace; as also, Independency, Latitudinarian tenets, and the other evils named in the above confession of sins."

We have already spoken of confessing our own and the iniquities of our fathers: a duty which cannot be denied by any one who believes what *was written afore time to have been written for our learning*. But whoever truly confesses those iniquities, sorrowing for them in a godly manner, will not be backward to resolve and engage, through grace, to forsake them. When the poor sinner sees the lothsomeness of his idols, he says of course, *What have I to do any more with idols?* Thus having endeavoured to make an honest confession of our own and the iniquities of our fathers, we proceed in the bond, to declare our resolution and engagement, through grace to forsake those iniquities. And who that knows what the scriptural exercise is of acknowledging sin, and of turning from it, will blame any set of people for binding themselves to forsake the evils they have confessed?

But with regard to the sins of our fathers, it is pretended, that we have not so much certainty of them as is necessary in order either to a suitable confession of them, or a suitable engagement against them.

We may answer by observing that we have manifold examples in scripture of the saints proceeding upon human testimony as to matters of fact, in the performance of religious duties. Psal. xliv. 1, 2, 3. Psal. lxxviii. 3,——8. We read in 2 Sam. xv. 31. that *one told David, saying Achitophel is among the conspira-*

ters. David had nothing for the truth of this fact but human teſtimony. Was David then to be hindered from praying about the treachery of a friend, becauſe he was not yet an eye-witneſs of it? Let his conduct ſay how he would have reliſhed ſuch an opinion. It follows in the ſame verſe, *And David ſaid, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counſel of Achitophel into fooliſhneſs.*

The Britiſh people are for ever bound to thank the Lord for their deliveran from heathen darkneſs and from popiſh idolatry, for the defeat of the Spaniſh Armada, for the happy diſcovery of the gunpowder plot, for the revolution, and for many other merciful interpoſitions of a wonder working providence. We hope no one will ſay, that we may neglect the duty of thankſgiving for theſe things, on this pretence merely, that we have no other way of coming at the knowledge of them than by human teſtimony. And yet the knowledge of the mercies for which we give thanks is equally neceſſary as the knowledge of the ſins which we confeſs. So when an Iſraelitiſh parent informed his children, according to the divine command, how the Lord brought their fathers out of Egypt, Exod. xii. 26, 27. and how miraculouſly he opened a way for them through the Jordan, Joſhua iv. 6, 7. it was evidently the duty of the children to give ſo much credit to their parents, teſtimony as was neceſſary in order to the religious exerciſes that correſponded with that naration.

It is objected, that the example of the Iſraelites in this matter, is not parallel to the point in hand, becauſe the facts they commemorated were ſuch as had been engroſſed into the inſpired volumes.

We anſwer, Surely the duty of remembering paſt inſtances of the Lord's kindneſs is the ſame to us, as it was to the Iſraelites; and conſidering the ſuperior advantages of the New Teſtament diſpenſation, the motives and incitements to ſuch a grateful remembrance are no leſs, but much greater to us than they

were to them. With regard to the circumstance of the facts commemorated being a part of the inspired history, it is not mentioned in the passages referred to, as necessary to the acceptable observance of this duty. Nay, in Josh. iv. 6, 7. the Israelites are commanded to make use of the twelve stones which were set up as a memorial of their passage through the Jordan, and which were the histories of those times; histories no more infallible than our own. Besides, we are not to be hindered from imitating the Israelites in their thankful remembrance of the Lord's mercies, because in their case it was attended with the extraordinary circumstance of those mercies being recorded by inspiration. Surely we may imitate Daniel's confession and prayer for the deliverance of his people, though his exercise, too, was attended with the extraordinary circumstance of the prophecy limiting the continuance of the Babylonish captivity to seventy years. Indeed almost all the examples in the Bible have circumstances of this kind. In fine, as was shewn with respect to the occasions of covenanting, it is by no means necessary to our imitation of a scripture-example, that *our* circumstances and *those* of that example be precisely the same. But to return to our subject;

Our praying for Christian brethren at a distance, and communicating to their necessities, necessarily proceed upon human testimony. Indeed without proceeding upon it, there can be little, if any, visible church fellowship. A propensity to receive the testimony of one another is a necessary part of our constitution which is not rooted out by the sanctification of the Spirit, but only directed to the glory of God and to our own good. The God of peace sanctifies us wholly in our spirit, and soul and body. This propensity, then, may be subservient to the duties of religion.

And surely if the church may proceed in religious duties upon human testimony at all, she may upon

the facts enumerated in the acknowledgment of sins. Let us consider what sort of facts they are. Are they facts of a private nature, to be found only in some private memoirs? Far otherwise; they are all of the most public nature; generally known among all ranks of people at the time they happened; standing uncontradicted in the histories of our public affairs; attested, many of them, by acts of the civil legislature or of church judicatures; and several of them remembered by many yet in life. It is now about forty years since the relation of these facts in the Judicial Testimony and the Acknowledgment of Sins has been lying open to the fullest examination, and to this day those who have shewn the greatest inclination to detract from the reputation of those papers, have not been able to detect a single falsehood in them.

VARIOUS are the attacks that have been made upon the Acknowledgment of sins. Some have carped at the manner in which several of the facts are therein represented; though the amount of all their criticisms, if duly considered, will be found to be no no more than this; that they considered the facts in another light, and put another construction upon them, than the framers of the Acknowledgment of Sins had done.

OTHERS again, have alledged, that it is not easily understood, and that the common people in the Secession are sworn against evils of which they are ignorant. Persons are, no doubt, liable to ignorance, unbelief and treachery of heart in covenanting as well as in other duties. But if ministers are careful to observe the charge which the Lord as really gives them as he gave it to the prophet Ezekiel, xxi. 2. *Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations*: and xx. 4. *Son of man, cause them to know the abominations of their fathers*: and if the people are actually in earnest to understand the Acknowledgment of Sins; if

they are dilligent in the use of means, not trusting to their own understanding, but relying with the whole heart on the guidance and direction of the enlightening Spirit, there will be as few ignorant Covenanters as ignorant communicants. We can only add, that those who in their writings have so severely reflected on the Bond and the Acknowledgment of Sins as deficient in perspicuity or precision, (for that seems to be the meaning of their declamation about people's swearing to what they do not understand) ought to have specified the obscure and ambiguous passages. The bulk of this generation seems to be of a very contrary opinion: It is their great offence that the Bond and the Acknowledgment of Sins are too plain, too pointed, and too particular.

Some parts of the Acknowledgment of Sins have been grievously misrepresented. An example shall be given. One passage of it has been said to maintain that what is commonly called *Cambuslang Work* was all a delusion and the work of the devil. But no such assertion is to be found in the Acknowledgment of sins. Indeed so far as that work led those people to lay stress upon bodily commotions, swoonings, convulsions, sudden terrors and joys, and imaginary ideas of Christ as man, taking these things for marks of conversion; so far may we justly deem Satan transforming himself into an angel of light to have been the principal agent in that work; especially considering their lax and unscriptural notions about the government and discipline of the church, and about the duty of witnessing for the cause and royal prerogatives of our Lord; notions which Whitefield the great promoter of that work gloried in, and by which his adherents were distinguished.

But the Associate Presbytery never meant to determine the fact; whether the truths of God's word then delivered at Cambuslang or elsewhere, were or were not effectual to the conviction and conversion of sinners. *The word of God is not bound*, whether it

may have come from the lips of Whitefield a Methodist haranguer, or of * Flechier eloquent popish priest.

THIRDLY, In the renewing of our covenants, there is necessarily a particular application of them to our own circumstances. As it would be the grossest absurdity to suppose that the covenants of our fathers bind us to regulate our conduct or our testimony for the truth according to their circumstances and not according to our own; so our bond, being an explanation of what our covenants oblige us to at present, is with obvious propriety adopted to our own circumstances.

THUS while we solemnly declare our consent to the obligations that were laid upon us in the loins of our fathers, we likewise for our own part, avouch the Lord to be our God, engaging to do the duties of our own situation, of our several places and callings. It is not enough that we approve of the covenanting of our forefathers: the Lord requires us according to the calls of providence, no less than he required them, to enter into covenant with him; to vow and pay to him.

SOME have complained of the act of the Associate Presbytery by which opposers, contemners, and slighters of covenanting are debarred from sealing ordinances in the Secession. The principle of this act is this: That no person ought to be admitted to the fellowship of a particular church, who adheres obstinately to some opinion or practice inconsistent with the observation of any thing which that church, as such, knows and acknowledges to be an ordinance of Christ. This principle we propose to consider and vindicate more fully afterward. At present, we only observe that without holding this principle, one

* In the Sermons of Monsieur Flechier, we have not only many beautiful models of eloquence, but several pertinent illustrations of divine truths.

cannot conceive how the immediate end of church-fellowship, which is to be helpful to one another in observing whatsoever Christ hath commanded us, can be gained; since, without holding this principle, our fellowship may be as much with those that hinder as with those that further our observation of his ordinances.

The occasion of covenanting is the same still as when it was begun by the Associate Presbytery. Which occasion is this: That while the bulk of the three nations have openly cast off the covenant which our fathers entered into with the Lord, a few in a state of Secession from the established churches, bearing the character of witnesses for Christ, have declared, with the solemnity of a public oath, their adherence to that covenant, or deed of conveyance of themselves and their posterity to the Lord. The opportunity is continued for others to declare their adherence to the covenant in the same way. Accordingly from year to year some are offering themselves for that purpose, and appearing under the banner of a sworn and subscribed testimony against the breaches of our covenants, and against the prevailing neglect and contempt of public covenanting.

Still there is no outward appearance of its becoming national. Few in number, poor and despised are the people that have as yet engaged in it. The body of these lands disregard their endeavours. But it is a comfortable token for good that the Lord does not mean to give up his claim to the isles of the sea, that he is putting it into the hearts of considerable numbers to recognise and maintain that claim. This is one of the most comfortable signs of our times: And if the Lord give them one heart and one way, and enable them to honesty in adhering to the word of their testimony, we may have good hope through grace, that they shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb; and that they shall be the means of beginning

a revival of our covenanted reformation which will increase till it overspread the land; which will exceed the former in purity, in spirituality and in the plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost; and which will send the savour of Christ and the glories of his kingdom over all the inhabited world. Thus the Lord *shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.*

ESSAY IV.

Of the State of the Church of Scotland immediately after the Revolution.

MANY and various were the advantages arising to Britain, from that wonderful interposition of Providence by which the Prince of Orange was raised to the throne; Liberty was established on a firmer basis: We were secured against the introduction of Popery: Scotland, in particular, was relieved from the yoke of Episcopacy, and saw that beautiful order, in some measure, restored, which Christ has appointed in his church. There was, then, a precious opportunity of returning to the Lord; but it was mournfully neglected. Both church and state were in a great trespass.

WITH regard to the state, it was wrong that the Prince of Orange was admitted to the throne without being required to give any proper evidences of his adherence to our covenanted reformation; or to make the support of it a condition of his government: for though this was not necessary to constitute such a relation between him and the British people, as rendered him a chief magistrate intitled to their obedience in things lawful; ‡ that relation, being in itself,

‡ Church-members are not to refuse a dutiful subjection to magistrates, or to neglect praying for them, because they are not such as they would themselves have chosen. The Lord's people are for the most part poor, afflicted pilgrims, and have seldom any considerable share in the modelling of governments, or in the administration of them: Hence they have commonly no more to expect from them than the preservation of their outward peace. Agreeably to this, the apostle enjoins us to *pray for kings and all in authority that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives under them in all godliness and honesty.*

juſtly held valid, whenever it is conſtituted with any ſuitable regard to the conſent of the people, or to the immediate end of magiſtracy, the welfare of civil ſociety; yet it was a great evil, that theſe nations neglected to acknowledge the Lord in this matter, paying little attention to his glory or to the good of his church; ſo that the Lord might ſay of us, *They have ſet up kings, but not by me, they have made princes, but I knew it not.*

IT was a neglect not only of religion, but of the common rights of juſtice and humanity; that there was no public inquiry with reſpect to the innocent blood that had been ſhed on religious accounts, nor any puniſhment inflicted for the ſhedding of it. The witneſſes of Chriſt were indeed relieved from the horrors of perſecution; but their oppreſſors, and ſome who had imbrued their hands in the blood of their brethren, were ſuffered to live undiſturbed, and ſeveral of them advanced to places of truſt and dignity.

BUT not to inſiſt on theſe things, we proceed to conſider the evils in the eſtabliſhment of religion.

IN the firſt place, The State diſcovered an abſolute diſregard of all that was done on the behalf of our covenanted reformation in the period between 1638 and 1650. Our rulers took no particular notice of the laws then made with reſpect to religion. Nay, the acts reſciſſory (by which the parliaments of that period and all they did, were annulled) are ſtill in force among the laws of Scotland. It is true, Preſbytery was eſtabliſhed. But that might be done without regard to the above-mentioned period; ſince Preſbytery had been ratified by government long before in the year 1592, (a ratification which is indeed referred to in the act of ſettlement) and ſince it was eſtabliſhed not as a part of the covenanted uniformity of the three nations, but only as moſt agreeable to the inclinations of the people in Scotland, they having reformed from Popery by Preſbytery. It is plain, that they did not mean to ſhew any regard to Preſ-

bytery as oppoſite to Prelacy, or in other words, as it was eſtabliſhed in the ſecond reformation; but only as oppoſite to Popery, that is, as it was eſtabliſhed in the firſt reformation. It is true, the rulers likewiſe ratified the Confeſſion of Faith; but this they did without taking notice of any former ratification of it: they only called it, *The public and avowed Confeſſion of the church*: "meaning no more," as a judicious writer obſerves, "than the confeſſion "of the church diffuſive of Preſbyterians, come out "of the furnace of perſecution, who were then be"ginning to recover, and be acknowledged in a na"tional church-ſtate." Remarkable is the difference between the act of the Scots Parliament approving the Confeſſion of Faith in 1649, and the act that parliament approving it in 1690. The former ratifies it as having been before approved by an act of the General Aſſembly, and as preſented to them by the commiſſioners of that aſſembly: But the latter ordains it to be the confeſſion of the church of Scotland without any regard to her preceding acts or her preſent application. The former ratifies not only the Confeſſion and Catechiſms, but alſo the acts of Aſſembly approving them as a part of the covenanted uniformity in the three kingdoms; whereas the latter ratifies the Confeſſion of Faith only.

It may farther be obſerved, that we have no reaſon to conſider particulars not expreſſed by the legiſlature, as belonging to the legal ſettlement of religion, on the footing, merely, of ſuch general declarations as the following: "That their Majeſties with "advice and conſent of three eſtates, revive, ratify, "and perpetually confirm all laws, ſtatutes and acts "of parliament made againſt Popery and Papiſts, and "for the maintainance of the true reformed Proteſ"tant religion, and for the true church of Chriſt "within this kingdom." General clauſes of this kind in the introduction to an act of parliament are not intended to add any particulars to thoſe mention-

ed in the act itself; for that would suppose that the framers of the act had purposely made it vague and indeterminate: Such clauses are only meant to recommend the law or act in which they are used from the general nature and tendency of it. Thus in the present case, the legislature represents the legal settlement of religion at the Revolution as a ratification of all former laws in favour of the Protestant religion and the kingdom of Christ: but how far it is so, we are still to judge from the particulars that are specified in the act of settlement itself.

THE parliament of Scotland at the Revolution, did nothing to vindicate the parliaments held in the period between 1640 and 1649, from the unjust aspersions which had been, and still continued to be cast upon them; but on the contrary concurred with the other branches of the legislature in the establishment of Episcopacy in England and Ireland; an establishment as directly contrary to our covenanted reformation as any of the proceedings of Charles II. This establishment was confirmed by the incorporating union. The Scottish Parliament's settlement of religion at the revolution, and its union with England may explain each other: for as we are not, without an evident necessity; and by no means on account of some general expressions in the preamble of an act, to consider the parliament as contradicting itself; so we may venture to affirm, that no more in the settlement of religion at the revolution than in the incorporating union with England, did the Parliament of Scotland mean to vindicate the parliamentary proceedings in the above-mentioned period or to revive our covenanted uniformity and reformation.

BUT for proof of this point, we need not insist upon the meaning of a particular act of parliament: Whatever approbation our rulers since the revolution, have given to our reformation from Popery in the period between 1560, and 1596; whatever abhorrence they have expressed of the persecutions in

the reigns of the two brothers, as contrary to humanity and civil liberty; we have no sufficient reason to believe that the sense of the legislature concerning the national proceedings in our covenanting period, has been any other since the revolution, than it was when the acts rescissory were passed. Are not those national proceedings constantly traduced as the proceedings of rebellion and fanaticism? Have not our governours, since the revolution as well as before it, countenanced such a representation of them? Do not the proceedings of parliament and the general practice of our courts of judicature since the revolution, shew that the legislature still considers the parliaments held between 1648 and 1649 with all their acts, as null and void? No member of parliament, either lord or common, is ever heard pleading upon any thing then transacted as an unexceptionable precedent. No court of justice will ground a single decision upon a parliamentary deed of that period. The acts of Charles II. however opposite, some of them, to the principles of the revolution, are in full force and in daily use, while the acts of our covenanting times, so perfectly agreeable to those principles, are expunged and forgotten. Besides, it was plainly against our covenanting period, that the oaths of allegiance and fidelity were imposed instead and in exclusion of all other oaths and declarations of allegiance, not excepting those religious covenants by which we lie under the most solemn obligations to be subject to lawful authority.* If we consider the neglect of this period in a political light, we have reason to lament that our fathers did not profit, as they might have profited, by the endeavours of some of the most upright and enlightened patriots that ever adorned our country, to secure to themselves and posterity the enjoyment of civil liberty. But considered in a religious light, the evil was unspeakably worse. It was

* See the last article of the Claim of Rights, and the second Act of the first session of King William and Queen Mary's first parliament.

the blackeſt ingratitude to the Lord, that we were no way concerned to remember the years of the right hand of the Moſt High: Surely this forgetfulneſs is one principal ground of the Lord's controverſy with theſe lands; ſurely it is wrong to palliate or excuſe it.

SECONDLY, The State then diſcovered a diſpoſition to encroach upon the liberty and independency of the church. The barons and commiſſioners from the royal burghs, aſſembled in parliament, determined, by their own ſole authority, what religious ſyſtem the church was to receive as her public and avowed confeſſion of faith: they fixed on the Weſtminſter Confeſſion of Faith without recurring to any former deeds of the church; particularly without referring to the act of aſſembly in 1647: an important act as it guards againſt any concluſions that might be drawn from the ſecond article of the thirty-firſt chapter of that Confeſſion, to the prejudice of the church's intrinſic power. The act reſtrains what is there ſaid of the magiſtrate's right of calling ſynods and aſſemblies to the caſe of *kirks not ſettled or conſtituted in point of government.* Hence on the head of the magiſtrate's power of calling church-courts, the confeſſion of faith ratified by the parliament at the Revolution was a different confeſſion from that which the church of Scotland had received in her pureſt times; it was leſs explicite on the above-mentioned article and more liable to miſconſtruction. Thus the State arrogated to itſelf a power of judging what it was proper for the church to receive as articles of belief.

IT was another inſtance of the magiſtrates diſpoſition to encroach on the province of the church, that he interpoſed his authority to procure admiſſion into the church for thoſe who, before the revolution, had been of the Epiſcopal perſuaſion. His Majeſty ordered, "that neither the aſſembly nor any commiſſion, nor any church meeting ſhould meddle in "any proceſs or buſineſs with reſpect to the purging

"out of the Epiſcopal miniſters." This was a plain infringement of the church's liberty as to the exerciſe of her diſcipline.

BESIDES, by the act in 1592, according to which Preſbytery was ſettled at the Revolution, the king or his commiſſioner, being preſent at the general aſſemblies of the church, is to appoint the time and place of their meeting: nay, the act ſeems to give the king or his commiſſioner the ſole power in this matter, not ſo much as hinting the concurrence of the aſſembly itſelf: "Providing," ſays the act, "that the king's majeſty or his commiſſioner be preſent at ilk general aſſembly before the diſſolving "thereof, nominate and appoint time and place when "and where the next general aſſembly ſhall be holden."

THUS the church is deprived of an important part of that liberty wherewith Chriſt has made her free, with regard to the meeting of his courts in his name. It is obvious, that this unlimited power of fixing the time and place for the meetings of the General Aſſembly, might be ſo exerciſed as to deprive the church of nearly all the advantages ariſing from that court. And it is well known how this power was exerciſed after the Revolution, particularly in diſſolving the aſſembly in 1692, and in adjourning its meetings from that time, till 1694. So the form of the commiſſion granted every year to the nobleman who repreſents his majeſty at the aſſembly is ſaid to run in this manner; "ſeeing by our decree "an aſſembly is met at ſuch a time. This muſt ſound harſhly in the ears of thoſe who have been accuſtomed to conſider ſynods and aſſemblies as courts of Chriſt the alone head of the church, and as not ſubject to any other than the decrees of Chriſt.

OTHER evidences might be produced of this diſpoſition, in the civil power, to encroach on the liberty of the church; ſtanding evidences, many of them, which every one has occaſion to witneſs. For ex-

ample, acts have been passed obliging ministers, on pain of ecclesiastical censures, of suspension and deprivation, to take certain oaths, such as those of abjuration and allegiance; or perhaps to read, on the Lord's day, certain papers, such as that concerning the death of Captain John Porteous. To the same purpose, we might take notice of the public fasts and thanksgivings appointed from time to time, by the sole authority of the civil magistrate.

THUS our State is chargeable with these two evils: with the utter neglect of the reformation attained to by our fathers; and with manifesting a disposition to encroach on the liberty of the church. The State has been either quite inattentive to the concerns of religion, Jer. ii. 33. *Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number:* Or instead of ordering political affairs in subserviency to the purity of the church, the State has moulded the church according to political interest and the popular inclination, Amos iv. 4, 5. *Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years. And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.*

WHATEVER we may say of the kindness of Providence at the Revolution; however much regard we must express for those eminently godly ministers whose lives and labours then edified the church; yet when we consider the proceedings of the church in her courts of judicature, we must acknowledge the truth of the following observations.

1. THE church made no suitable remonstrances against the evils of the civil rulers; but submitted to their impositions. Happy to find outward circumstances now so much changed for the better, professors thought it improper and unseasonable to find fault with the arrangements made by the civil autho-

rity. When the fears and alarms we have been long harraſſed with, are over, we are too apt to give ourourſelves to unwatchfulneſs and indolent repoſe. As ſoon as the church of Scotland was relieved from oppreſſion at the Revolution, ſhe ſeems to have fallen inſenſibly into a great degree of that ſin of Iſrael which the prophet reproves, Micah vi. 16. *The ſtatutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the houſe of Ahab, and ye walk in their counſels.* The people of this generation have little or no impreſſion of the heinouſneſs of public evils, or of compliances with the wicked ordinances of magiſtrates; but the Lord ſhews us the ruin that follows upon ſuch compliances in the following words: *That I ſhould make thee a deſolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hiſſing.*

2. THE church took no due care to vindicate our covenanted reformation from the indignities that had been done to it in the great apoſtacy of the two preceding reigns. There was no particular acknowledgment, by the church-judicatures, of the ſeveral ſteps by which our fathers declined from that reformation: no expreſs or ſuitable condemnation of thoſe enſnaring bonds, oaths and declarations, which had been framed in the preceding reigns for annulling our ſolemn covenants; and which had occaſioned great ſufferings to the witneſſes of Jeſus: nor any particular act paſſed by the General Aſſembly for the neceſſary purpoſe of vindicating the alone headſhip of Chriſt over the church, and the church's intrinſic power; truths which had been ſo recently trampled on with heaven-daring contempt. Far from inflicting due cenſure on any for being concerned in the grievous apoſtacy from our covenanted reformation, the judicatures did not ſcruple to receive into communion the indulged miniſters, and even ſome who had been of the Epiſcopal denomination: the indulged miniſters, who had meanly ſubmitted to

preach under such limitations, both with respect to the matter and manner of their preaching, as a tyrannical and malignant prince thought proper to impose. Thus, at the Revolution, the church of Scotland was, by no means, duly concerned to make an impartial inquiry into the grounds of the Lord's controversy, not to purge out the old leaven; things so necessary to be done that without them there never was, nor ever will be any thorough reformation.

3. THE church neglected, at the Revolution, to take proper steps toward the revival of national covenanting. Considering to what an uncommon height all ranks of men had carried their perfidy toward the Most High, it was unquestionably the duty of the church to acknowledge the breach of her covenant with the Lord, and to avow her return to him as explicitely and solemnly as she had ever done. But the judicatures did not so much as pass any particular act for the purpose of asserting the obligation of our covenants on these lands; or even the morality of what our fathers had done in entering into such engagements. The passing of such an act might have prepared the way for national covenanting. Surely it was wrong to treat with so much neglect the public covenant-relation to the Lord, into which, thro' his good hand upon our godly progenitors, he had graciously brought the isles of the sea.

4. TESTIMONIES against these neglects were much disregarded. The above-mentioned paper of Mr. Shields was read in a committee, which, having passed a severe censure upon it, refused to lay it before the assembly. Other petitions and representations were treated in the same manner. Various instances of the like tyrannical treatment of petitioners, by the committees and commissions of the General Assembly, have occurred since that time; particularly in the years 1731 and 1732. From these well known transactions it may easily be inferred: That in the state of the church of Scotland after the revolution, there

was a grievous departure from our covenanted reformation, since the facts on which these testimonies proceeded, (facts which could not be denied even while recent) were so many instances of such departure: And that the state of the church of Scotland after the revolution was that of a backsliding, not of a reforming church. We do not speak of particular members, or particular parts; but of the whole body of the church; of her judicatures, especially the supreme. We do not speak of particular acts of assembly, (for several of these, passed since the revolution, have been very commendable) but of the disposition manifested in the general course of judicial proceedings, toward that purity and agreeableness to the word which the church had attained in what is called our covenanting period.

Thus the church aggravated the errors of her conduct, by disregarding the testimonies that were given against those errors. This greatly heightened the Lord's controversy with the land, Hosea xi. 7. *My people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him.*

On the whole, it seems very plain, that both church and state were, at this time, chargeable with neglecting our covenanted reformation. It was in direct opposition to it, that the state imposed, and the church accepted, an Erastian settlement of religion. And though they removed some real evils, and did several things really commendable; yet those evils were not removed as contrary, nor these good things done as agreeable, to our covenanted reformation. All that the Lord's right hand wrought for us in the above-mentioned period, and the obligations of our solemn covenants were either despised, or forgotten, or at least, no way suitably regarded by church and state.

We may be ready to apologize for our fore-fathers at the revolution, considering them as men liable to the ordinary weaknesses of our nature. Sud-

den and surprising events, like the revolution, commonly fill the human mind with such a confusion of hopes, fears and anxieties as render it incapable, for a time, of calm reasoning and deliberation

INDEED we have no reason to think, that, in their situation, we ourselves would have acted more faithfully than they did: And were we drawing the character of any individual who had a share in these wrong managements at the Revolution, charity would lead us to admit every excuse or alleviation with which the circumstances of the case, or the general tenor of his principles and behaviour should furnish us. But we are speaking of public measures, not of private characters: We are inquiring, whether the proceedings of church and state were right or wrong. Here it behoves us to guard against palliating any thing really sinful, as ever we would avoid the curse pronounced against those who call evil good, and good evil: We must bring the proceedings in question to the test of the word, and try, whether church and state improved the opportunity providence had given them, as they ought? whether they endeavoured to hold fast whatever conformity to the word had been already attained in these lands? whether they were duly concerned to wipe off all the reproaches that had been cast on Zion's king, on his cause and interest? Whether their measures were such as evidenced a sincere desire to make progress in reformation? Whether, in fine, they chearfully complied with the Lord's call to return to him? or whether they treated it with neglect and opposition?

WE have insisted the more largely on the manner of settling religion at the Revolution, as the evils of it may justly be accounted the root of all those corruptions which are now grown to such a height in the church of Scotland. It is only the Erastianism and worldly policy which prevailed in the Revolution Settlement, that have ever since been operating with increasing strength, in patronages, in the civil magi-

ſtrate's abſolute and authoritative appointment of faſt days, and in other inſtances of incroachment on the church's freedom and independence. Then were admitted into the church a ſet of corrupt, time-ſerving office bearers who had accepted of indulgences and beenguilty of baſe compliances with the open apoſtacy in the two preceding reigns: The ſucceſſors of whom, increaſing ever ſince, have now become the ruling party, or rather, (as, in the communion of the eſtabliſhment, there is no regular oppoſition to them on the principles of our covenanted reformation) their leaven has now leavened the whole lump. That enmity againſt a faithful teſtimony for the truth, (which immediately after the Revolution was manifeſted by the judicatures diſregarding petitions and repreſentations) grew ſtronger by degrees, till it came to ſuch a pitch that miniſters were no longer allowed to have proteſts marked in the records of the Aſſembly, but were proſecuted in a vexatious manner, for teſtifying in their doctrine againſt the public corruptions; and at laſt when they would not ſubmit to be cenſured for what they judged their duty, they were ſuſpended and caſt out of communion. In fine, the revolution church having admitted to her communion a great many perſons of the moſt jarring principles, formed a body of very heterogeneous parts, and had evidently in her conſtitution the ſeeds of all the ſeceſſions and diviſions that have ſince taken place among her members.

THUS, we have reaſon to ſay of thoſe who profeſs to bear teſtimony againſt the preſent corruptions of the eſtabliſhed church of Scotland, while they approve the manner of its eſtabliſhment at the Revolution; that they condemn in the effect the ſame thing which they juſtify in the cauſe: They are too much like thoſe of whom the prophet complains, Lam. ii. 14. *Thy prophets have ſeen vain and fooliſh things for thee; and they have not diſcovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have ſeen for thee falſe burdens and cauſes of baniſhment.*

ESSAY V.

Of the Church's Toleration of any thing ſinful.

THE term *Church* is frequently to be underſtood as comprehending all that are called out of the world *lying in wickedneſs* to the fellowſhip of Chriſt; all that are ſaved and ſet apart to the ſervice of God, Eph. v. 25, 26. *Chriſt loved the church and gave himſelf for it: that he might ſanctify and cleanſe it with the waſhing of water by the word, that he might preſent it to himſelf a glorious church.* Hence it is called the ſpouſe of Chriſt, his ſpiritual temple, his body. This church, being made up of his friends only, manifeſts or makes herſelf viſible by obſerving his commands, John xv. 14. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatſoever I command you.*

INDEED, the real enemies of Chriſt may pay him an external homage, and appear to be church-members: nevertheleſs, the true end and deſign of ſuch homage as preſcribed by Chriſt, is to diſtinguiſh his real friends from his real enemies; and thoſe only are true church-members whoſe external homage correſponds to that end and deſign; others are liars and impoſtors, Rom. x. 6. *They are not all Iſrael which are of Iſrael: neither becauſe they are the ſeed of Abraham, are they children,* 1 John ii. 19. *They went out from us; but they were not of us.* Traitors may wear the badges of loyal ſubjects: but theſe badges were never deſigned for traitors †.

† A church ought, no doubt, to proceed upon viſible evidences in judging particular perſons to be duly qualified church-members; and in conſequence of ſuch a judgment, they muſt be reckoned church-members with reſpect to all the purpoſes of external ſociety.

THE enemies of Chriſt can no more be reckoned true church-members for being among them, than tares can be reckoned wheat for growing together with it, Matth. xiii. 24,—30. A number of the enemies of Chriſt agreeing together for ſome carnal ends to make a fair profeſſion of his name, might, from that profeſſion, bear the denomination of *his church*; but in truth they would only be *a ſynagogue of Satan*. Rev. ii. 9. *I know the blaſphemy of them who ſay they are Jews, and are not, but are the ſynagogue of Satan.*

SOCIETY, however, as an inſtance of obedience to the commands of Chriſt, is one principal way of rendering our church-memberſhip viſible, Heb. x. 25. *Not forſaking the aſſembling of yourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is.* 2 Theſſ. v. 11. *Wherefore comfort yourſelves together and ediſy one another, even as alſo ye do.* Acts ii. 42. *They continued ſtedfaſtly in the apoſtles doctrine and fellowſhip, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.* It is a ſociety in ſpiritual exerciſes and in ſpiritual privileges, that is here meant.

BUT we are very much limited in the enjoyment of ſociety: it cannot have place but in proportion as nearneſs of ſituation, acquaintance, ſimilarity of principles and views, give occaſion to ſocial inter-

But it is plain, that the ordinances and proceedings of a church agreeable to the word and warranted by the authority of an inviſible king and head, have an immediate reſpect to an inviſible kingdom in the hearts of men, for the erection of it in thoſe who are to be church-members, and for the advancement of it in thoſe who are ſuch already: So that in the caſe of mere nominal Chriſtians, theſe ordinances and proceedings may juſtly be laid to want what is properly their object in church members. Hence the abſurdity of any aſſociation of men imagining that, when by carnal policy they increaſe their numbers, they are therefore contributing to the increaſe of the church of Chriſt: Hence, too, the importance of the ſcriptural ordinances and the ſcriptural proceedings of a church of Chriſt to vital and practical religion; all ſuch ordinances and proceedings having an immediate reſpect to, and an appointed influence upon, the inviſible kingdom of God in the heart: Finally, hence no ſociety can poſitively allow the contempt of ſuch ordinances or proceedings without injury to practical religion. Whatſoever is contrary to thoſe ordinances and proceedings, being contrary to ſound doctrine, is likewiſe ſo *to the power of godlineſs*.

courſe. Hence as it is impoſſible for all the members of the church of Chriſt, ſcattered over the whole world, to hold fellowſhip immediately and habitually with one another in a viſible church-ſtate; it is neceſſary that they form themſelves into various diſtinct ſocieties for the worſhip of God and for their mutual edification. Theſe ſocieties are called *Churches*, Acts xv. 41. *He went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches.* Rom. xvi. 16. *The churches of Chriſt ſalute you.* Such were the churches of Corinth, of Epheſus, of Galatia, of Theſſalonica, of Philippi and of Coloſſe.

IT is abundantly clear, that every church, in this ſenſe of the term, ſhould be conſtituted according to the pattern which Chriſt hath given us in his word. She ſhould conſider herſelf as in the ſame relation to Chriſt with his church or myſtical body at large, and as under the ſame obligations to endeavour after conformity to him in all things. Hence the apoſtle Paul ſo often ſpeaks to particular churches in terms that are properly applicable to the church inviſible: *Feed*, ſays he to the Epheſian elders, *the church of God which he hath purchaſed with his own blood. I am confident*, ſays he to the Philippians, *of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jeſus Chriſt.* The more exactly a particular church is conformed to the pattern of the word, her members have the better opportunity of evidencing by their fellowſhip with her, that they indeed belong to Chriſt's myſtical body. This is an end ſo important, that where it is not in ſome degree anſwered, the proper deſign of a viſible church is utterly loſt.

THE queſtion which we now propoſe to conſider is this: Whether a church of the kind juſt now mentioned, may tolerate in her members the practice or profeſſion of any thing ſhe herſelf acknowledges to be ſinful? *Any thing*, we ſay, whether, comparatively conſidered, it is of greater or of leſs

importance; whether it has been or is ſtill controverted among Chriſtians: if it be really ſinful and acknowledged by a church to be ſo; it is with regard to that church, what is here meant by *any thing ſinful*, as being oppoſite to ſome of the truths and duties known and profeſſed by that church; for the attainments of other churches are out of the queſtion.

When a church condemns any thing judicially, ſhe is juſtly conſidered as holding it to be ſinful; ſinful either in itſelf, or on acount of ſome offenſive circumſtances attending it. We have a remarkable inſtance of this kind in the Acts of the apoſtles, fifteenth chapter. As the proceedings of the ſynod at Jeruſalem are an excellent pattern for the imitation of all future ſynods; ſo, in what is ſaid of the obligation of their decrees upon the churches, we have proper inſtruction as to the regard that is due to the ſynodical deciſions that are conſonant to the mind of the Holy Ghoſt ſpeaking in the ſcriptures. Theſe decrees are called a burden laid upon the church, Acts xv. 28. *For it ſeemed good to the Holy Ghoſt and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than thoſe neceſſary things.* We cannot ſuppoſe a perſon would have been admitted a member of the church of Antioch, who ſhould have refuſed to take upon him the common burden of the church, Beſides no perſon in that church could reject thoſe decrees without being in ſome degree liable to the charge, which the ſynod brought againſt the Judaizing teachers, of *troubling the church and ſubverting ſouls.*

It is not our preſent deſign to determine the degree of cenſure to be paſſed upon perſons who are chargeable with what is meant in the queſtion by *any thing ſinful.* That ſubject may be conſidered afterward. We may only obſerve, that a church may juſtly be conſidered as tolerating what ſhe herſelf owns to be ſinful, if perſons openly chargeable with it, and who give no evidences of being ſorry for it or of deſiring to forſake it, are habitually admitted to the moſt ſacred pledges of her communion.

IT is a dictate of ſcripture and of reaſon, that the diſcipline of a church ought to correſpond with her doctrine. If ſhe allows in her terms of communion the ſame thing which, in her public inſtructions, ſhe acknowledges to be ſinful; what does ſhe but deſtroy in one way what ſhe builds in another? Hence if a church ought, according to the Lord's expreſs injunction, to teach her members to *obſerve all things whatſoever Chriſt hath commanded us;* ſhe ought likewiſe, to make the obſervance of all thoſe things as far as the viſible church-ſtate will permit, the general term of her communion; and conſequently ſhe ought not to tolerate in her members any thing in particular that ſhe acknowledges to be contrary to Chriſt's command, or, in other words, to be ſinful. Thus, as the practice of a church member ought to be according to his knowledge, ſo the diſcipline of a church ought to be according to her doctrine.

IT is inconſiſtent with that watchful care which the church ought to exerciſe over her members, to ſuffer ſin upon any of them, or poſitively to tolerate any evil in them, whether with reſpect to principle or practice. The duty of the church to each of her members is, in this particular, the ſame as that of one individual to another, Lev. xix. 16. *Thou ſhalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy brother, and not ſuffer ſin upon him.*

THE toleration, in queſtion, is inconſiſtent with the good order of any ſociety; and therefore is contrary to the general rule, *Let all things be done decently and in order.* Suppoſe a particular practice is determined by any ſociety to be wrong and utterly inconſiſtent with the deſign of its erection; to admit perſons into ſuch a ſociety, while they are openly chargeable with that very practice, would be the deſtruction of policy and good order. Now, when a church declares any thing to be ſinful, ſhe declares it to be, on the matter, inconſiſtent with the great purpoſe ſhe was deſigned for, with her teſtimony a-

gainſt the enemies of Chriſt, with that univerſal holineſs which is her honourable and heavenly characteriſtic, Ezek. xliii. 12, *This is the law of the houſe; upon the top of the mountain, the whole limit thereof round about ſhall be moſt holy. Behold, this is the law of the houſe.* It is therefore utterly againſt the law, the appointed order of the houſe, for any church to allow her members in what ſhe herſelf acknowledges to be ſinful.

THIS toleration is likewiſe contrary to the remarkable analogy between the caſe of the viſible church and that of the particular believer. The believer is one who *hates every falſe way:* however weak or defective, he muſt not, even for a moment, give poſitive allowance to any ſin. Nothing, indeed, is more plainly or more neceſſarily implied in the character of a believer than this; that he maintains a conſtant oppoſition to whatever he accounts ſinful, and belonging to the old man or the kingdom of Satan. And though the oppoſition may ſometimes be faint, or ſeem greatly overpowered, yet it is out of character for the Chriſtian to drop it altogether, even in a ſingle inſtance. It is no leſs unbecoming a church of Chriſt, ſo far to give up her oppoſition to any thing ſhe acknowledges to be ſinful, as to allow it openly and expreſly in her members. The public character of the church in all in her proceedings, ought to be, at once, a counterpart, an example, and a help to the real Chriſtian. Every particular church, conſtituted agreeably to the word, conſiſts of ſuch as are, or at leaſt acknowledge they ought to be, ſaints or members of Chriſt's myſtical body: and therefore though ſome other things may belong to the deſcription of a church than what belongs to that of the Chriſtian; yet we ſhould not have any thing to ſay of the former *contradictory* to what we ſay of the latter. But that would be the caſe, were we to aſſert that a church may tolerate in her members, what no Chriſtian can allow in his practice.

THE toleration we ſpeak of, is inconſiſtent with the due maintenance of a teſtimony for truth: which appears whether we conſider whom this toleration admits to church-communion, or the truths and duties which are thereby diſregarded. For, if a church admits to her communion one perſon who obſtinately rejects ſomething which ſhe herſelf acknowledges to be a truth or a duty of God's word, ſhe cannot conſiſtently refuſe admittance in the ſame way to ten, to twenty, to a hundred, to a thouſand, or any number that may apply to her for that purpoſe. Hence that whole church may ſoon come to be made up of thoſe who obſtinately reject ſuch a truth or duty; and who inſtead of holding, trample upon a teſtimony for it. And then, if we conſider the intimate connection among the truths and duties of Chriſtianity, not only as bearing the ſtamp of the ſame authority, but as they are mutually ſupported by and dependent on each other; it will appear, that, if a church allows her members in a poſitive rejection of any thing that ſhe herſelf acknowledges to be a truth or a duty of God's word, ſhe will ſoon extend her allowance, and her members their rejection to other truths and duties: becauſe the ſame reaſon that was deemed ſufficient for ſuch a toleration in the caſe of one truth or duty, will be found alſo ſufficient in the caſe of others. Beſides, if reaſons drawn from the external circumſtances of the church, or from the characters of particular perſons are allowed to overbalance the authority of Chriſt in one inſtance, they will ſoon be allowed to do ſo in more. Thus, through the powerful tendency of depraved nature to backſliding, a relaxation of diſcipline, or a church's ſuffering her members to neglect *any* thing which Chriſt hath committed to her truſt, being once wilfuly and deliberately begun, will, in the ordinary courſe of things, continue on the increaſe, till her laxneſs arrive at ſuch a pitch that ſhe ſhall not retain the leaſt appearance of faithfulneſs to her truſt in any reſpect whatſoever.

INDEED, seeing church-members have no joint participation of their spiritual privileges, nor joint exercise of religious duties, or, in other words, they do not walk as church-members at all, but in so far as they are *of one heart and one way:* it is plain that they bear no suitable testimony in their united capacity against any thing sinful, but in so far as they are unanimous in their opposition to it as such. Hence the apostle gives that solemn caveat against diversity of judgment among church-members, 1 Cor. i. 10. *I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.* For a church to admit to her communion persons who avowedly approve and practise what she herself condemns as sinful, is to invite the very thing which the apostle here solemnly charges her to guard against.

FARTHER, This toleration is contrary to all such texts of scripture as warrant separation from corrupt churches and disorderly walkers, 2 Cor. vi. 17. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you.* 2 Thess. iii. 6. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.* If we ought not to continue our fellowship with persons that walk disorderly, we ought much less to receive such into our fellowship. Surely it is as necessary to endeavour to keep infection out of the house; as to leave it after it is infected. But the toleration in question says, that endeavour is needless. Besides, the duty of a church and of particular persons in this matter is reciprocal: for it is no less incumbent on a church to withdraw from corrupt persons, than for persons to withdraw from a corrupt church.

OBJECT. 1. "Would you then have a church re-
"quire perfection in her members."

ANSW. It is only meant, that she should not tolerate or *suffer sin upon them.* As her pastors must *not shun to declare the whole counsel of God;* so she must not shun to testify against and censure whatever is opposite to that counsel. Indeed her members are far from being perfect: they are spiritually diseased, like others; only while others remain insensible of their miserable condition, they profess to be convinced of it, and to want a cure. Hence the church, if she acts the part of a wise and good physician, and aims at a thorough cure, will endeavour to examine every symptom, and to spare no part of the disorder: She will not be guided by fair but deceitful appearances, or by the inclinations of her patients, but by the grand, infallible dispensatory of heaven, the Bible.

OBJECT. 2. "It is enough, if a church oblige "her members to the essential truths and duties of "Christianity; she need not be so strict with regard "to circumstantials."

ANSW. Surely, the very circumstantials of Christianity, like the filings of gold, are precious; they should not be thrown away, but carefully gathered up and preserved. And pray, how may the circumstantial truths of the Bible be known from the essential?

"THE circumstantial are such as we may be ig-"norant of, or deny, without endangering our sal-"vation."

OBVIOUS enough indeed! but the question still recurs, how may these be distinguished from others?

THIS answer is not only unsatisfactory, but it is insnaring, as it seems to insinuate that the evil of error lies *only* in the danger to which it exposes our souls, and not in its opposition to the authority of God speaking in the word: and thus the idol of depraved nature, Self, under the refined pretext of concern for our everlasting salvation, is made the

rule and reaſon of our faith in divine truth: for, upon this ſuppoſition, the evil of rejecting divine truth is deemed leſs or greater according as ſelf is endangered by the rejection†. But it is unworthy of reaſonable creatures, who ſhould *do all for the glory of God*, to make ſelf their end and aim. Self is a very doubtful rule; ſelf, we mean, as a principle of man's corrupted nature. It is peculiarly doubtful in the preſent caſe; as we are far from being competent judges of the comparative importance of divine truths; and as one principal danger is here entirely overlooked, that of *making God a liar*.

THE truth is, we ſhould eſtimate the danger of any error rather by the degree of evidence which, in the caſe of that error, is rejected or deſpiſed, than by our notions about the ſuperior value and importance of one truth compared to another, John iii. 19. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil:* Compared with verſe 23. *No man receiveth his teſtimony.* Our danger lies not merely in rejecting ſuch truths as we think of great importance to our ſalvation; but in our loving darkneſs rather than light; which light is God's teſtimony. It is not ſaid our condemnation is, loving errors more than ſome of the moſt important truths revealed in the word; but the expreſſion is general; our condemnation is the not receiving of God's teſtimony; the whole of which is repreſented to us under the notion of light in oppoſition to darkneſs. Hence it is plain, that our rejection of any one truth belonging to what is here called, *the light that is come into the world*, or to the divine teſtimony in the word, is ſo

† A concern for our ſalvation, ſubordinate to the glory of God, is our indiſpenſible duty; but, ſeparated from a ſingle regard to the glory of God, it is an abomination. We are to receive the word, in the firſt place, on account of its divine authority, or *as the word of God*; we are to receive it, in the ſecond place, *that we may be ſaved:* The primary ground and reaſon of faith is, not that ſuch truths are connected with our ſalvation, but that they bear the ſtamp of *Thus ſaith the Lord.*

dangerous that it may be our condemnation. It is, indeed, undeniable, that, in religion, there are truths of more importance than others: but as there is no rule laid down in the word for fixing precisely the degrees of their importance, it seems to be the only certain as well as scriptural way of estimating the evil of error, to consider the degree of light and evidence (including both external and internal evidence, both outward instruction and inward conviction) to which the error stands opposed*.

ON this principle, it is, indeed, still evident, that there is greater guilt, for the most part, in the denial of the more important truths of Christianity, on account of the greater degree of light and evidence with which they are attended. At the same time, supposing there are two points of divine truth which, considered in themselves, appear to be, one of greater, the other of less importance: the evil of denying the latter in some circumstances, may be more aggravated than that of denying the former in other circumstances.

THUS the errors of those Judaizing teachers who were for bringing the Christians at Antioch under the yoke of circumcision, seem to have been far more blameable, than the mistaken apprehensions of the disciples, while they followed Christ in the days of his flesh, with respect to the nature and necessity of his death and resurrection; though it is plain, that the truth about the death and resurrecti-

* The following passage of an eminent writer in the Deistical controversy is very opposite to the loose manner in which many speak of what they call the *circumstantials* of Christianity: "As it is "one of the peculiar weaknesses of human nature, when, upon "a comparison of two things, one is found of greater importance "than the other, to consider this other as of scarce any impor- "tance at all: it is highly necessary that we remind ourselves, how "great presumption it is, to make light of any institution of divine "appointment; that our obligations to obey all God's commands "whatever, are absolute and indispensable; and that commands "merely positive, admitted to be from him, lay us under a moral "obligation to obey them: moral in the strictest and most proper "sense." *Butler's Analogy*.

on of Chriſt, is, in many reſpects, of more importance than the truth about the freedom of Chriſtians from the yoke of circumciſion. But here was the difference: the diſciples were weak and ignorant; but they did not ſet themſelves againſt the truth, like the Judaizing teachers, to the troubling of the church and the ſubverting of ſouls.

OBJECT. 3. "It ſeems better for the church to "leave many things indifferent: it is enough that "her members walk honeſtly according to the light "of their conſcience."

ANSW. The church ought to leave a thing indifferent, if the law of God leaves it ſo. Nor ought ſhe to declare a thing ſin or duty, for any other reaſon whatſoever, than this; becauſe either the thing itſelf, or the neceſſary conſequences of it, are plainly commanded or plainly forbidden by the law of Chriſt; for the buſineſs of the church is not to make laws, but to publiſh thoſe of Chriſt.

WITH reſpect to perſons acting according to the light of their conſciences, it is, at beſt, only one part of holineſs, namely, ſincerity: and however excellent it is, other parts of holineſs are alſo neceſſary; ſuch as, an humbling ſenſe of our ſinfulneſs and miſery, the ſaving knowledge of God in Chriſt, reliance on the Spirit of grace, watchfulneſs, ſpiritual ſtrength and ſtedfaſtneſs, livelineſs and activity in the way of the Lord. Thus, though ſincerity is eſſentially neceſſary in church-members, they ought to have other qualifications than ſincerity.

IT is true, conſcience is God's deputy in the ſoul, declaring in his name one thing to be duty, and another to be ſin: ſoothing with its approbation, if we comply with the former; and denouncing vengeance and fiery indignation, if we commit the latter. For a perſon to act contrary to the dictates of conſcience, is to rebel againſt and contemn the authority of God; whoſe voice the perſon either hears or thinks he hears in the remonſtrances of conſcience. But

this, like the other faculties and operations of the ſoul, is now corrupted: and though it ſtill ſpeaks in the name of God, and ſhews much of the law not yet blotted out of the heart; yet it is, in many inſtances, weak, miſtaken or defiled. 1 Cor. viii. 7. *Howbeit, there is not in every man that knowledge*, or a well conformed conſcience, *for ſome with conſcience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol*, that is, they conſider their doing ſo as rendering them partakers of idolatry, and yet they do not abſtain from it; *and their conſcience being weak is defiled.* As the whole man is defiled with ſin, the conſcience is ſo in particular, Tit. i. 15. *To them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conſcience are defiled.* Here it is plain the defilement *of them that believe not*, and *of their mind* is ſin; and we have no reaſon to put any other interpretation upon the epithet *defiled* as here applied to the conſcience, than what we put upon it as applied to *them that believe not* and to *their mind.* But what is it for the conſcience to be defiled with ſin? Is it to accuſe of ſin and condemn on account of it? No, for that is only its duty: But ſurely the conſcience is defiled, when it calls evil good, and good evil.

THERE is not any thing, indeed, in which the great degree of man's corruption more ſignally appears than in this; that the conſcience itſelf is drawn over to the ſide of wickedneſs. Hence our Lord ſays, Matth. vi. 23. *If the light which is in thee be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs!*

SURE no one will deny that conſcience is liable to error, if he conſiders, that it is no other than the mind of man as exerciſed in judging of ſin and duty, and viewing the conſequences of right and wrong conduct. A ſmall acquaintance with ſcripture and with human nature will be ſufficient to convince us that men are continually forming falſe judgments, on thoſe ſubjects.

BUT to speak more directly to the objection, the rule it insinuates for the admission of persons to the communion of a church may well be rejected for this reason; that it is impracticable. A church may know in some measure, the agreement between a person's profession and his outward practice; because both the one and the other may, alike, be subjected to her examination. But in order to know whether these be agreeable to the person's conscience, the church must find means to bring that secret principle, without the help of either words or actions, under a judicial review. But can she indeed enter the person's mind, observe the moral lights as they rise, mark each conviction wrought by the word and Spirit of God, and hear the warnings of conscience before they are put into words? We can perceive the agreement or disagreement between two extremes only in so far as we know the extremes themselves. But here the church has not the least knowledge of the one, that is, the person's conscience; otherwise than as it is uniformly manifested by the other, that is, the person's conversation.

OBJECT. 4. "It seems warrantable from the xiv. "chapter of the epistle to the Romans, for a church "to receive persons that differ from her in some of "their opinions and practices."

ANSW. It is very unlikely, that Paul who shewed on all occasions such a concern to preserve the peace and purity of the church; who so earnestly exhorted the Thessalonians to *withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly;* who warned the Ephesian elders to beware of ravenous wolves that would *creep in among them, not sparing the flock;* who wished to have them cut off that troubled the church of the Galatians; who withstood Peter to the face when he took part with those Judaizing teachers that were such enemies to the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; we say, it is very unlikely that this faithful and zealous apostle would direct the church of Christ at Rome to receive into her bosom such as

were open and avowed despisers of any thing that she herself acknowledged to be a command of Christ. Hear what a solemn charge he gives to this very church: *I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* But who are they whom a church must consider as the causers of such divisions and offences? Those, undoubtedly, who in the eyes of that church, openly and obstinately despise any commandment of the Lord. Surely, then, the apostle would never advise the Romans to receive such into their communion.

THE case concerning which the apostle here gives directions, was shortly this: Some persons who had been probably either of Jewish extraction or proselytes, having professed their faith in Christ, continued still to observe many of the usages of the ceremonial law; they abstained from certain sorts of meat; they kept certain days, such as, those of Pentecost and of the Passover. These persons had expressed their desire of being admitted into the association of Christians at Rome. They were ignorant indeed, but they wanted to grow in grace and in the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ: they indeed still thought it their duty to observe some parts of the ceremonial law; but they were, by no means, enemies to Christian liberty; they sought an opportunity of being farther instructed in it. The apostle directs the Romans to receive these persons into their communion; and shews how respectfully and charitably church-members ought to behave toward them, and they again, toward fellow-church-members. It is obvious, that these persons, meek humble, teachable, desirous of getting free from their prejudices in respect of which they were rather weak than wicked, were directly the reverse of those Judaizing teachers, troublers of the church and subverters of souls, against whom the apostle cautions the Philippians in these words: *Beware of evil workers, beware of dogs, beware of the concision.*

It is neceſſary to enquire more particularly, what thoſe things were, the practice of which in theſe weak and unexperienced church-members was to be borne with. Thoſe uſages may be conſidered in two lights:

First, They were things that God expreſly commanded under the Old Teſtament. The perſon of whom the apoſtle is here ſpeaking, was convinced of this; but he was not ſo much enlightened in the knowledge of the New-diſpenſation as to ſee that theſe things were already abrogated. We need not wonder that this was the caſe with private church-members, when even the apoſtle Peter was ſo much ſtumbled at ſome of the privileges of the New-diſpenſation, Acts x. 14. Gal. ii. 11. How great was the difference between the regard theſe Chriſtians had for the uſages which bore the ſtamp of divine authority, and that ſuperſtitious attachment to certain modes of religious worſhip, for which no other warrant can even be pretended than the invention and authority of men? Hence the apoſtle ſays in verſe 6th of this chapter, *He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord*, that is, he is influenced by the divine authority of the Old Teſtament precept enjoining the obſervation of ſuch a day: and on the other hand, *He that regardeth not the day, to the Lord doth he not regard it*, that is, he likewiſe is influenced by the divine authority of the New Teſtament revealing our freedom from the burden of ceremonial obſervances. To the ſame purpoſe the apoſtle adds, *He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, and giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and he giveth God thanks.* The import of this thankſgiving is, that the one as well as the other aimed at the glory of God in what he did. But ſure it is only ſo far as a perſon is ſwayed by a regard to God's authority that he can be ſaid to aim at his glory in what he does; eſpecially ſo to aim at it as to be worthy of the apoſtolic approbation. But

it may be aſked, how it came about that the ſame principle of regard to God's authority could lead ſome to do, and others not to do, the ſame things? This was owing to a peculiar circumſtance of that period: the Lord ſaw meet that the ceremonial, which was his own law, ſhould die gradually and be buried honourably; and that his people ſhould get, by degrees, from under the yoke of the Old Teſtament, to enjoy the glorious liberty of the New. Hence the apoſtle repreſents the old diſpenſation, not as removed at once by an inſtantaneous introduction of the new, but as *decaying, waxing old and ready to vaniſh away.* The Lord was pleaſed to bear with the weakneſs of his people in their attachment to ſome of the ancient ceremonies; while they were not ſo fully inſtructed in the reaſons of the abrogation of them as he deſigned they ſhould be afterward by the epiſtle to the Hebrews and other books of the New Teſtament not then publiſhed; while the obſervation of the Old Teſtament worſhip was not rendered impracticable by the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the temple; and while they did not ſeek juſtification by a ſcrupulous adherence to the law of Moſes, putting it in the place of Chriſt and his righteouſneſs. Thus the Lord did not condemn them; and what are we, that we ſhould cenſure them with ſeverity? The ſynod of the apoſtles and elders of which we read in Acts xv. inſtead of condemning them, made a decree for preventing the Gentile converts from giving them offence. Should it ſtill be urged, that if it was right to obſerve theſe ceremonies, then the omiſſion of them muſt have been ſinful: We anſwer, that though theſe uſages may be conſidered as having been enjoined by divine authority; they alſo admit, as they were obſerved by ſome Chriſtians at this time, of another conſideration: viz.

SECONDLY, That they were of an indifferent nature; that is, they were things which Chriſtians were neither expreſly commanded, nor expreſly for-

bidden; things which they were or were not, to practiſe according to the meaſure of their light, and of their acquaintance with the nature and privileges of the New Teſtament diſpenſation. The obſervation of the ceremonial law, even under the Moſaic œconomy, depended upon the circumſtances of time and place: circumciſion was diſcontinued the forty years that the children of Iſrael ſojourned in the wilderneſs: No ſacrifices were offered during the ſeventy years of the Babyloniſh captivity. Thus compared to the ſuperior and perpetual obligation of the moral law, the obligation of the ceremonial, even when in its higheſt vigour, may be ſaid to have been only occaſional, circumſtantial, and ſubject to change. Immediately after the death and reſurrection of Chriſt, it became indifferent; that is, the church could no longer require her members to obſerve it, except in ſo far as it was neceſſary for the exerciſe of charity toward weak brethren. Still, however, the Lord would have it honoured as his own law; nor might any one caſt it off till he was ſo much enlightened in the knowledge of the New Teſtament diſpenſation, as to ſee the Lord's warrant for doing ſo. To be ſo much enlightened was far from being, at this time, the general attainment of church-members, eſpecially of thoſe who had been accuſtomed to the uſe of the ceremonial law, it being the Lord's uſual way to carry on his work by degrees. Hence he did not permit the church at once to declare the obſervance of the ancient inſtitutions unlawful, leſt very many, not being duly enlightened in the knowledge of the new-diſpenſation, ſhould have been tempted to trample upon the authority of God, by their ignorant manner of caſting off thoſe inſtitutions. The church, therefore, was in the right to leave many of them indifferent. Hence the apoſtle ſays, *To him that eſteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteouſneſs and peace and joy in the Holy Ghoſt. For he that in theſe things ſerveth*

Chriſt, is acceptable to God and approved of men. Had the uſages the apoſtle here ſpeaks of, been contrary to any command of God, ſurely perſons could not be ſaid to have ſerved Chriſt in them; and inſtead of being acceptable to God, and approved of men, they would have been deſpiſers of the divine authority, and in the ſight of men tranſgreſſors of the law. The indifferent nature of theſe uſages appears, too, from the reaſon which the apoſtle aſſigns for prohibiting church-members from the open contempt and diſregard of them; which is, that ſuch contempt and diſregard would offend weaker fellow-church-members. *All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat fleſh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother ſtumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.* We cannot better define an indifferent thing than by ſaying, That it is a thing which becomes wrong whenever it becomes offenſive. We cannot ſay that of any thing which God hath expreſly commanded or forbidden.

WHAT we have ſaid may help us to underſtand ſeveral exhortations in this chapter. *Him that is weak receive, but not to doubtful diſputations.* This does not ſay, that we ſhould not defend the truth by diſputing againſt error: God's bleſſing has often made diſputation uſeful to his people: It is recommended to us by the example of Stephen, of Paul, and of our Lord Jeſus himſelf. But the diſputation againſt which the apoſtle here warns the Romans, was doubtful; it was diſputation which neceſſarily began and ended in doubt; as neither he who condemned his brother for regarding the ceremonial uſages, nor he who condemned his brother for the neglect of them, had any plain declaration of God's word on his ſide. Beſides, diſputation at an unſeaſonable time, and in an unſuitable manner, tends to diſcourage and offend weak church-members, and to fill them ſtill more with doubt and perplexity. Again, the apoſtle ſays, *Let every one be fully perſuaded in his own mind.*

This does not mean that a perſon ſhould be very confident and obſtinate in his opinion, whatever it is. That is only ſelf conceit; it is what the Lord ſtrictly prohibits even with reſpect to things that ſeem to be in themſelves indifferent, Deut. xii. 8. *Ye ſhall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every one whatſoever is right in his own eyes.* A perſon who does whatſoever is *right in his own eyes*, or in modern language, according to his conſcience, is but a poor character in the Bible. But the intent of this exhortation, is, that our conſciences ought to be well informed of the mind and will of God as to whatever we do; and particularly, that a due reſpect ſhould be paid to the authority of God in regarding or not regarding the uſages of the ceremonial law. The apoſtle explains his meaning by his own example in verſe 14. *I know, and I am perſuaded by the Lord Jeſus, that there is nothing unclean of itſelf.* Farther, the apoſtle ſays, *Who art thou that judgeſt another? To his own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth.* We muſt not underſtand this as a warrant to overlook the conduct of our brother, or to neglect reproving him for his offenſive behaviour. It was the language of Cain, *Am I my brother's keeper?* We muſt not only teach, but alſo admoniſh and reprove one another. We muſt not with-hold what the Pſalmiſt calls *a kindneſs, and precious ointment that ſhall not break the head.* This caveat, therefore, muſt be underſtood as levelled againſt that evil which our Lord condemns, Mat. vii. 1. *Judge not, leſt ye be judged;* againſt either thinking or ſpeaking uncharitably of the perſon or ſtate of our brother, eſpecially on account of a diverſity of opinion and practice as to indifferent things. Once more the apoſtle ſays, *Haſt thou faith? have it to thyſelf.* It does not follow from this, that we ſhould not make a profeſſion of our faith for the edifying of the church; which would be contrary to the exhortation in verſe 19. *Follow the things wherewith one may edify another;* and in Heb. x. 13. *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering.*

The apoſtle's meaning is this: if a church-member has ſtrong faith, he may enjoy the comfort of it before God, and bring forth the genuine fruits of it in holineſs of heart and life; but he ſhould not inſult over his weak brethren, nor do any thing that may prove offenſive or ſtumbling to them.

WE have dwelt the longer on this chapter, not only becauſe it is often quoted on the ſubject of church-communion, and often perverted; but alſo becauſe it is a paſſage of ſcripture that is peculiarly uſeful for the direction of the church with regard to the receiving of ſuch perſons and the eſtimation of ſuch things as the apoſtle here ſpeaks of. Things that the church, in her repreſentative or collective capacity, has never determined and cannot clearly determine from ſcripture to be ſin or duty, may juſtly be conſidered in the ſame light as the meats and days here mentioned: and as to the matter of admiſſion to the fellowſhip of a particular church, ſuch things, whatever individuals may think of them, are ſtill to be held indifferent: that is, neither the omiſſion nor the performance of them ſhould be any bar to church-communion. Beſides even with reſpect to ſuch things as the church has determined to be ſin or duty, perſons ſhould not be utterly rejected for their ignorance of ſome of them, provided they are ſuch perſons as *the weak in the faith* toward whom the apoſtle exhorts the Romans to behave with ſo much tenderneſs and charity. Among thoſe who apply for admiſſion to the fellowſhip of any church, ſhe ought certainly to make a difference between the weak and the wicked; between the teachable and the obſtinate; between the ignorant and thoſe who contradict and blaſpheme; between thoſe who love the light and lament their want of it, and thoſe who hate it becauſe their deeds are evil.

OBJECT. 5, "Every church ought to imitate "Chriſt her head: he holds communion with his "people notwithſtanding much remaining corrupti-

" on: Who would partake of his fellowſhip, were " he to exclude from it all that are chargeable with " any thing he has declared to be ſinful?"

ANSW. We own, the communion of the ſaints with Chriſt, and their communion with a particular church may be compared together, in ſuch reſpects as the following: Thoſe who have communion with Chriſt are ſuch as make it the ſtudy and buſineſs of their lives, to keep his commands, 1 John ii. 3. *Hereby do we know that we know him*, or have union and fellowſhip with him, *if we keep his commandments*. So it is only thoſe whom a church judgeth to be ſuch that ſhe ought to admit to her fellowſhip. He chaſtiſes his people when they wander from his way, by various rods; particularly, by depriving them of the comfortable ſenſe of their communion with him, Pſal. lxxxix. 30, 32. *If his children forſake my law, and walk not in my judgments,—then will I viſit their tranſgreſſion with the rod, and their iniquity with ſtripes:* In like manner, a church ought to cenſure her members when ſhe ſees them go aſtray.

BUT ſtill it does not neceſſarily follow that whoever has real communion with Chriſt muſt have likewiſe actual communion with a particular church; for in ſome reſpects there is no compariſon between the one and the other. The communion of Chriſt and that of a particular church cannot be compared in reſpect of neceſſity. The latter is indeed one of the appointed means of our ſanctification; but the former belongs to the very eſſence of our ſanctification. A perſon may be ſanctified by the fellowſhip he has with Chriſt in his word and in prayer, though he ſhould never have an opportunity of joining himſelf to any particular church. It is neceſſary for Chriſt to hold real communion with his people at all times, in their worſt as well as in their beſt caſes. Thus *he preſerves their ſouls in life*, even when the overflowing of ſome corruption renders them rather hurtful than edifying to fellow church-members. He takes care of them e-

ven while in the hands of their enemies; reſtraining theſe enemies, and over-ruling all their deceit and violence to his own glory. Such was his gracious preſence with the ark while in the hands of the Philiſtines, that inſtead of deſtroying it, they were obliged to do it honour. Thus Chriſt was with Peter to ſupport his faith, even when Satan was permitted to ſift him as wheat. Farther, the communion of the ſaints with Chriſt and their communion with a particular church cannot be compared with one another in reſpect of the evidence on which they proceed. Chriſt, as *he knows what is in man*, deals immediately with the hearts of his people; but the church can only deal with their outward profeſſion and their outward practice. As he diſcerns the naughtineſs of a church-member under the faireſt external appearances; ſo, too, the reality of grace, even where the church can ſee nothing but evil; and ſuch evil as appears to render him unfit for her communion. It is plain, therefore, that, in ſome reſpects, we cannot draw a ſtrict parallel between a perſon's inviſible communion with Chriſt and his viſible communion with a particular church. Indeed the communion of poor ſinners with Chriſt is a myſtery of incomparable grace and ſovereignty. When a particular church receives a perſon into her communion, it is with this view; that ſuch a perſon may be uſeful to her as well as that ſhe may be ſo to him. But in our communion with Chriſt, he alone is profitable to us, not we to him; if we are enabled to make him any returns of ſervice and of gratitude, he is himſelf the author and the finiſher of them. *He works all our works in us.* We dare not hold communion with diſorderly brethren, becauſe being evil already, we grow worſe by evil communications: But Chriſt may well invite them to communion with him; becauſe he is able to render them meet for it; he *ſanctifies them wholly*.

SINCE a church's poſitive allowance of any thing in the practice or profeſſion of her members which

is acknowledged by herself to be sinful, appears contrary to the ends that are common to the church with other societies; and still more so to those that are peculiar to herself: it may be useful to observe the progress and the effects of such toleration in various churches.

The most flagrant instance of it is in the church of Rome. After the fourth century, as her corruptions increased, that course of public humiliation, which, as it was at first practised in the church, was only designed to evidence the repentance of public offenders, came at length to be considered as a proper commutation for offences and for crimes. When the pretensions and abuses of clerical power were carried to a great height, then the church pretended that it belonged to her alone to regulate those commutations. In consequence of that, the Pope and his council decreed various alterations with respect to them; as, that money should be accepted instead of those humiliating appearances formerly in use: In order to give weight and authority to such absolutions, they represented them as the same, or inseparably connected with those of heaven: having gone thus far, it was not difficult to go a step farther; they offered not only pardon for the past, but indulgence for future crimes: And that they might not seem to have undertaken what was beyond the compass of their power, they pretended to have discovered a treasure of merit in the church; a treasure consisting of the works of supererrogation performed by innumerable reputed saints, together with the infinite merits of Christ. Then was a certain price put upon every crime; and a member of the church of Rome, on paying a sum of money, had all the allowance his spiritual guides could give him, to persist in the practice of the greatest villanies. No wonder that so enormous an abuse was among the first things that occasioned that concurrence of wonderful events which distinguished the æra of the Reformation,

NOR have the reformed churches themſelves been duly careful to keep clear of this evil. Thus if we take a view of the church of England; what with the inconſiſtency between her ſuperſtitious modes of worſhip and her teſtimony againſt the church of Rome; what with the cuſtom of adminiſtring the Lord's Supper in order to qualify perſons for civil offices; what with her dependance on the ſtate, and her obſequious compliances with it; what, in fine, with her total neglect of church diſcipline, (the penalties impoſed on offenders by the biſhop's courts being rather a perſecution of the members of civil ſociety than the exerciſe of ſpiritual diſcipline on church-members as ſuch) the church of England is deeply chargeable with this evil.

THE church of England and the church of Scotland have public articles and confeſſions of faith directly pointed againſt the tenets that go under the names of Arianiſm, Socinianiſm and Arminianiſm: but where is the perſon who is now kept from their communion on account of thoſe dangerous errors?

THE opinions laid before the aſſembly for the judgment of that court, in the proceſſes of Meſſrs. Simſon and Campbel, are plainly contrary to the acknowledged principles of the church of Scotland; and yet how thoſe offenders were ſcreened from due cenſure, is well known. Nothing can be more contrary to her eſtabliſhed order and rules of diſcipline, than for a clergyman to be intruded into the miniſtry of a reclaiming congregation: And yet how many ſuch clergymen are in her communion?

IT is lamented by the ſerious part of thoſe who are ſtill in the communion of the church of Scotland as well as by others, that, in admitting perſons to her ſealing ordinances, there is daily leſs attention paid even to ſuch things as are allowed by Chriſtians in general to be ſinful and immoral.

NOR are thoſe who profeſs to have withdrawn

from the eſtabliſhment in Scotland on account of its corruptions, free from blame in this matter.

For example; thoſe who call themſelves, *The Preſbytery of Relief, becauſe they are ſaid to relieve the Chriſtian people from the oppreſſive execution of the law of patronages*, declare, by their profeſſion of the preſbyterian religion, that whatever is contrary to it, particularly Epiſcopacy and Independency, is to be held ſinful: and yet, by a determination of their clergy*, they invite ſuch as are openly chargeable with thoſe evils, to participate in the moſt ſacred pledges of their communion.

With reſpect to another ſet of diſſenters from the Eſtabliſhment, their practice in oppoſition to their brethren; ſuch as their neglecting to ſet about public covenanting at preſent, their juſtification of the religious clauſe in ſome burgeſs oaths, their cenſuring various paſſages in the Judicial Act and Teſtimony; is, at leaſt, plainly an allowance of what is determined to be ſinful in public deeds which, by their own confeſſion, they themſelves have paſſed; deeds which they have never yet thought proper to repeal; and therefore deeds, under the authority and obligation of which they are ſtanding to this day†.

* See a copy of this determination in pages 30, 31, 32. of a late valuable publication, entitled, *The Relief Scheme conſidered.*

† The public deeds here meant, are theſe: The Act, declaration and teſtimony, publiſhed in 1737; The Act of the Aſſociate Preſbytery for renewing our ſolemn covenants in a way and manner agreeable to our ſituation and circumſtances in this period, paſſed in 1743; and the act of the Aſſociate Synod againſt ſwearing the religious clauſe in ſome Burgeſs Oaths, paſſed in 1746. The Brethren of whom we here ſpeak, pretend to find *errors and miſtakes* in the firſt of theſe acts: They deem the ſecond, in contradiction to its title, *unſeaſonable and diſagreeable to our preſent circumſtances*: The *manner*, they ſay, in which the Synod paſſed the third was *raſh* and *unfair*: Some of them are traduced as having the worſt *effects*; as raiſing *doubts* in the minds of many perſons; and as encouraging a ſpirit of *pride*, of *ſelf-conceit* and *animoſity*. One ſhould think that any act juſtly liable to theſe charges ought, in reaſon, to be repealed; and yet, however amazingly prepoſterous it may ſeem, ſome of theſe very charges have been offered as an apology for not repealing one of the acts abovementioned.

WITH reſpect to another body of diſſenters who refuſe to acknowledge the preſent civil government in Britain, we may obſerve, That their principles on this head, conſidered as in oppoſition to the principles of thoſe who are endeavouring as well as they, to teſtify againſt every thing in the civil conſtitution or adminiſtration that is really evil, or contrary to our covenanted reformation, muſt imply a diſapprobation of all the public juſtice and all the preſervation of peace and good order we have by means of the civil magiſtrate: principles which are not only unwarrantable; but which never can be carried into practice, unleſs we either take arms againſt civil ſociety, or forſake it. This is an inſtance of a church declaring ſomething to be ſinful in which ſhe muſt either indulge her members, or oblige them, as the apoſtle ſays in another caſe, *to go out of the world.* This indulgence is dangerous as having a tendency to the relaxation of diſcipline: and ſo much the more, that occaſions daily occur, ſuch as the paying of taxes and the ſummoning of perſons to appear before civil courts of judicature; which can hardly fail to be attended with ſuch compliances as, according to thoſe principles, are doubtful at leaſt, if not evidently ſinful.

UPON the whole, when a church oppoſes the truth as maintained by another church; when ſhe ceaſes to endeavour after more conformity to the word of God; when ſhe is ſatisfied with her attainments and values herſelf upon them; we have reaſon to conclude ſhe is in a backſliding ſtate; a ſtate which is not only characterized, but in a great meaſure conſtituted by this unſcriptural toleration.

ESSAY VI.

Of the Conſtitution of the Aſſociate Synod.

ON this head, we would only offer ſome anſwer to the two following queſtions: The firſt is, Whether that body of miniſters and elders which met in Mr. Gib's houſe the next morning after the breach, (of which we have given ſome account) had a right to act as a court of Chriſt? The other is, Whether the denomination of the Aſſociate Synod belonged to that body?

WITH regard to the firſt we may obſerve, that if ſeveral perſons regularly called and ordained to the office of the holy miniſtry meet together in order to exerciſe the authority which Chriſt hath given them for the edification of the church, taking their warrant and encouragement from his word, Matth. xviii. 20. *When two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midſt of them;* if the general ſcope or tenor of their proceedings be ſuch as gives ſome good evidence that they are ſincerely aiming at the glory of Chriſt, and the advancement of the church's peace and purity; if they are not in any ſtated oppoſition to the truth or teſtimony of Jeſus as held by another ſociety, (for we muſt not ſet up altars by God's altars, nor weaken the hands of thoſe who are truly bearing witneſs for Chriſt) if theſe things are found in any body of eccleſiaſtical office-bearers, what ſhould hinder us from accounting it a court of Chriſt?

As for the above-mentioned miniſters, it was never heard that even their enemies objected to the va-

lidity of their call and ordination to the sacred office. And whatever may have been wrong in particular instances, the general tendency of their proceedings to the revival of our covenanted reformation seems very evident. To demonstrate this, we might enter into a detail of their transactions; but that does not seem necessary, the character here given to their proceedings being such as those who are the least acquainted with them, will hardly offer to deny; a character indeed that will not much recommend them to the fashionable part of this generation. They have published several acts on behalf of the purity of presbyterian discipline and government; on the behalf of public covenanting as a moral duty, and proper to be set about at present: and charity, which thinketh no evil, will acknowledge that, whatever errors some may suppose them chargeable with, they have endeavoured, in the general tenor of their conduct, to preserve an entire consistency with those acts. And, alas! what is the greatest attainment of either societies or individuals in the present state of imperfection, but endeavouring to do well? The most successful are those who are most taken up in acknowledging and lamenting their mistakes and failings, looking, at the same time, that they may be set right by the word and Spirit of Christ.

AFTER all, if they were stating themselves in opposition to any point of the testimony of Christ as held by those of another profession, it would be much against them; it would go a great way to destroy their pretensions to the authority of a court of Christ. The purest church may walk contrary to the truth in particular instances: but the case here supposed is the fixed opposition of a corrupted to a pure profession: and we own that Christ will never give the stamp of his authority to that opposition; and that where it becomes the characteristick of a society to such a degree, as to have the ruling influence in its proceedings; that society, so far as this is the case, may justly be considered as destitute of the authori-

ty of the Lord Christ, who says, *He that gathereth not with me, scattereth:* It is obvious, that he will never lend his authority for the purpose of scattering, or opposing his cause and testimony.

This charge, however, of being in a stated opposition to any part of the present truth or testimony of Christ, has very seldom been brought against the judicatures of the Secession. Some, indeed, have insinuated the charge. How well they have supported it by attempting to find faults and historical mistakes in the judicial testimony and other deeds of the associate presbytery and the associate synod, must be determined by candid examination. Those, however, who have any discernment of the necessity of the Secession-testimony as levelled against the various steps of defection, since the year 1649, from our covenanted reformation, cannot well refuse to acknowledge the Associate Synod as a court of Christ: for, admitting that the Secession-testimony is according to the word; admitting that the constitution of the synod is not against any point of that testimony, held by some other society; but is in defence of the whole in opposition to many enemies of it; one should think there is no reason to doubt of the synod being a court of Christ, having a right to act authoritatively in his name: for it is undoubtedly a court of Christ the constitution of which is grounded upon an adherence to the testimony of Christ.

It now remains that we enquire whether that body of Seceders which, for the sake of distinction, we have already called the Associate Synod, or the defenders of the religious clause of some Burgess Oaths, have the better right to that title?

It will easily be allowed, that a court, or indeed any society may retain its title, as long as, generally speaking, it holds the principles and pursues the ends, which gave occasion to the title. Bodies of men, have, indeed, often continued to go under the same names after the original principles and ends of their

aſſociation were loſt. Thus though the Roman ſenate, (meaning a free and independent branch of the legiſlature) was no more after the uſurpation of Julius Cæſar, yet the title continued to be given to an aſſembly which was only the echo of the Emperor's will and pleaſure. Thus Great Britain may have a parliament and yet want, what every true Briton underſtands by that word, a guardian of the rights and liberties of the people. In this way, deſigning and ambitious men put ſuch titles on their projects and undertakings, as are beſt calculated to deceive the unthinking populace into a favourable opinion of theſe projects and undertakings, and to divert the attention from their real nature and tendency. It is a common artifice, and yet almoſt every day we ſee it, in ſome degree, ſucceſsful. The ſcripture (which indeed ſupplies armour againſt every evil) warns us againſt this abuſe of language, telling us of ſome *who ſay they are Jews and are not, but are the ſynagogue of Satan.* Hence when we enquire after the aſſociate ſynod, let us guard againſt taking up with the name where the principles and the ends of its inſtitution are forſaken. Surely the diſtinguiſhing principles of its inſtitution, in due ſubordination to the ſcriptures of truth, were no other than thoſe expreſſed in the Judicial Teſtimony and ſworn to in the bond for the renovation of our covenants: and the great end of its inſtitution was the maintenance and preſervation of thoſe principles.

Now, there are two bodies of eccleſiaſtical office-bearers, each of which calls itſelf, The Aſſociate Synod. To which of them does the title juſtly belong? To that body which has made a violent oppoſition to ſome important parts of the Judicial Teſtimony, and which diſapproves of engaging in the above-mentioned bond; or to that which is never blamed for any thing ſo much as for abiding by the

teſtimony and the bond, even to a fault? It ſeems to be abundantly clear, which of theſe two bodies is the Aſſociate Synod, on the ſuppoſition that we are to ſeek it where the the Seceſſion Teſtimony, as it was ſtated by the Aſſociate Preſbytery, directs us. This is, at length, rather a matter of fact than a matter of reaſoning.

With regard to the accidents which took place at the breach, let us for a moment, ſuppoſe the worſt: let us ſuppoſe that the members of the ſynod took ſome irregular ſteps; that they broke through ſome common forms: are we to conclude that, on account of a tranſient act not quite agreeable to ordinary forms, their conſtitution was overturned, tho' they were, as much as ever, holding faſt the teſtimony on which their conſtitution was founded? Few ſocieties would exiſt during the courſe of a ſingle year, were they to be diſſolved by every act that is irregular. The truth is, the members of ſynod had a right from the Lord Jeſus the great head of the church, a right prior and ſuperior to all thoſe forms which human prudence has deviſed for preſerving decency and order; a right which no accident could deprive them of; to come together as providence gave opportunity, to form themſelves into a court of Chriſt, and in that capacity, to exhibit and maintain the teſtimony they had ſolemnly eſpouſed.

When we examine into the propriety of their conduct, we ſhould conſider that nothing is more abſurd than to confound the conſtitution of the ſynod with any particular place of meeting, or with any particular number of members; or to ſuppoſe that the conſtitution of the ſynod is affected by any accident or violence which might occaſion an alteration in theſe reſpects. The conſtitution of the ſynod may be preſerved, in any place where it is convenient to meet, by two or three or any greater number: and if their meeting is broke up by any unexpected accident, they may ſeize the firſt opportunity of com-

ing together again, and proceed to act as a court of Christ, for the edification of the church without ever once supposing that their constitution was infringed. The reason is, that the members of a presbytery, synod, or any other court of Christ, derive their warrant and authority to meet, not from their former meetings, but immediately from his word; his word which respects each of their meetings alike, and independently of any connection with the rest; for he still says to his servants on every such occasion, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

CONSIDERING the synod's constitution in this light, can we reasonably suppose that it was any way injured, because it removed from a place where the freedom of its procedings was violently controuled; or because it consisted of twenty-three members only, who zealously opposed a question, the affirmative of which, though it overturned their constitution as a witnessing court of judgment, was carried against them by twenty? It is true, these twenty considered themselves as the majority: in order to make up which majority, they annexed to their number, contrary to all the rules of procedure in courts of judicature, such as were silent on the question. But supposing (as the twenty-three members who met in Mr. Gib's house believed) that the advocates for the lawfulness of the religious clause of some burgess oaths, by their obstinate adherence to the affirmative of the above-mentioned question, had forsaken the constitution of the Associate Synod, (a constitution which consisted entirely in an adherence to a testimony for our covenanted reformation); surely in that case, it was necessary for these twenty-three members, if they were heartily concerned to preserve the synod's constitution inviolate, to leave a place where those who had forsaken that testimony, were assuming an uncontrouled superiority. They were evidencing the most genuine regard for the con-

ſtitution of the Synod, when they forſook thoſe who had forſaken that conſtitution.

On the whole, ſince the ſynod held the ſame teſtimony, and contended for the ſame covenanted work of reformation after as before the breach, its conſtitution appears to have ſuffered no alteration from what happened on that mournful occaſion.

ESSAY VII.

Of the Church's power to inflict Cenſures.

SOCIETY cannot well ſubſiſt without government; nor will the ends of government be attained if it has not the power, both of beſtowing privileges and of inflicting puniſhments. The church, being a ſociety inſtituted by the Lord Chriſt, cannot once be ſuppoſed to be without government, or any of the requiſites of government. The glory of his wiſdom and of his goodneſs, makes the ſuppoſition abſurd. Accordingly governments are mentioned among the benefits that the Lord beſtowed upon the church, 1 Cor. xii. 28. *God hath ſet ſome in the church, firſt apoſtles, ſecondarily prophets, thirdly, teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diverſities of tongues.* Some of theſe particulars indeed, were extraordinary, and continued only for a time in the church; but no body will conſider *governments* which are common to ſocieties of every kind, as belonging to this claſs. We cannot ſuppoſe that the apoſtle means civil magiſtracy, ſince theſe governments, as is plainly the caſe with the other things here mentioned, are immediately given to the church by her great head, as tokens of peculiar favour; whereas magiſtracy is a common privilege which providence grants to mankind at large. The names and exhortations that are given to miniſters and to church-members are ſuch as plainly intimate the relation between thoſe who govern and thoſe who are ſubject to government, Acts xx. 28. *Take heed unto yourſelves, and to all the flock*

over which the Holy Ghoſt hath made you overſeers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchaſed with his own blood. 1 Theſſ v. 12. *We beſeech you brethren, to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admoniſh you.* Heb. xiii. 6. *Remember them who have the rule over you, who have ſpoken to you the word of God.* Ver. 17. *Obey them that have the rule rule over you, and ſubmit yourſelves, for they watch for your ſouls, as they that muſt give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.* The greek word tranſlated *thoſe that have the rule over you,* is a name, ſays Beza, very remote from the claims of ambition, while it ſecures very great authority to faithful miniſters. Pontius Pilate's higheſt title was a word that comes from the ſame verb. The term is employed by Stephen, in Acts vii. 10. to deſcribe Joſeph as next in authority to the king of Egypt. Nay the ſame word is uſed in Matth. ii. 6. to denote our Lord's ſupreme authority over his people. We muſt allow then, that there is a right of governing veſted in the paſtors of the church; a power or authority which the Lord hath given them for edification, and not for deſtruction. This is meant by the keys with which the apoſtles, and in them all the ſucceeding miniſters of the word, were entruſted. In ſaying to Peter, Matth. xvi. 19. *And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,* our Lord ſhews him how much the grace of God would be manifeſted in his caſe. The Father had revealed Chriſt to him in a ſaving manner: by which revelation he was enabled to make a faithful confeſſion of Chriſt as the Son of the living God. And on this confeſſion, or rather on Chriſt who is called a rock, 1 Cor. x. 4. as exhibited in this confeſſion, was the church to be ſo built that the gates of hell were never to prevail againſt her. Peter was likewiſe to be honoured with the full power of an apoſtle of the Lamb. But we have no reaſon to ſuppoſe, with the church of Rome, that the keys here mentioned were given to Peter excluſively of the reſt of the apoſtles.

There is no appearance afterward, of Peter being poſſeſt of any other office-powers than his fellow-apoſtles. Nay, preciſely the ſame explication of the keys which is here addreſſed to Peter is addreſſed to all the apoſtles equally, in Matth. xviii. 18. *Verily, I ſay unto you, whatſoever ye ſhall bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven, and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth, ſhall be looſed in heaven.* So much, by the way, concerning the popiſh blaſphemy which would make Peter the rock on which the church is built, in direct oppoſition to the determination of the Holy Ghoſt, 1 Cor. iii. 11. *Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt;* and which would give Peter a lordly dominion over his brethren in direct contrariety to the expreſs charge which our Lord gave the diſciples, Luke xxii. 25, 26. *And he ſaid unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exerciſe lordſhip over them: and they that exerciſe authority upon them are called benefactors.*

We have ſtill farther evidence that the keys in queſtion include a right to govern. Theſe keys were primarily given by the Father to Chriſt as mediator and head of the church; from whom the office-bearers of the church have them to be inſtrumentally or miniſterially exerciſed for her benefit. Now, the keys that were committed to Chriſt were thoſe of government, as appears from Iſa. xxii. 22. *And the key of David will I lay upon his ſhoulders:* (equivalent to the expreſſion Iſa. ix. 6. *The government ſhall be upon his ſhoulder*). *So he ſhall open, and none ſhall ſhut; and he ſhall ſhut and none ſhall open:* compared with Rev. i. 18. *I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.* Theſe keys are among the gifts which the exalted Redeemer received for men, even for the rebellious, that God the Lord might dwell among them, Pſal. lxviii. 18. and which he gives to the church for her edification, Eph. iv. 7, 8, 11. Hence he ſays to his diſciples after his reſur-

rection, John xx. 21. 23. *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you;* As if he had said, The keys which I received from the Father as his honorary servant, I commit to you, who are in like manner, my servants, as I am the Father's.

THESE keys are to be exercised by the pastors and rulers of the church meeting together in Christ's name, or by what the apostle calls a presbytery or eldership, 1 Tim. iv. 14. *Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.* It may be admitted as a maxim, that we should set about every duty as well in a social as in an individual capacity, unless (as in personal self-examination) there is something in the nature of the duty which makes it impracticable for a society as such to perform it. But no body will say that there is any thing in the nature of the keys of government which Christ has committed to the office-bearers of his house, that forbids the social exercise of them: Reason and the history of mankind recommend it, declaring that in the multitude of counsellors there is safety: the scriptures warrant it. In Matth. xviii. 15,—18, the judicative power before which the case of an offence between two brethren is directed to be laid, is called the church, ἡ ἐκκλησία;* a word that has no meaning at all, if it does not signify a society greater or less; a

* This name was borrowed from the Greeks, as being descriptive of the followers of Christ, who are *called out* of the world lying in wickedness; as serving to distinguish them from the Jews who chose to be called *the synagogue*; and, in fine, as being very familiar to the Gentiles who were to compose the greatest part of God's people. Besides there is something popular and engaging in this appellation; because it was used among the Greeks to denote a multitude of people assembled, regularly indeed, and according to law, but consisting of citizens of various ranks and situations in life, not excluding the lowest. Hence it was an appellation highly proper for the church of Christ; of which the apostle says in 1 Corinth. i. 26. *Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.* As to the authority of the *ecclesiæ* or assemblies of the people in the ancient Greek Republics, it was very great; the laws were made, magistrates elected, peace and war resolved on, by the suffrage of those assemblies.

word that, the critics agree, is used in the best Greek writers for an assembly that has the power of judging and determining causes; a word that, in this passage, stands connected with such circumstances as naturally lead us to understand it of some lawful judicature: for why is it so expressly required that what passes between the two parties, should be established in the mouth of, at least, two or three witnesses, but that there may be sufficient evidence for the church to proceed upon, according to the rule of judicial procedure in Numb. xxxv. 30. and Deut. xviii. 6.? It seems to be abundantly clear, who are meant by the church, from the 18th verse. If any should object to our Lord's injunction, that perhaps the sentence of the church would be as much disregarded as the remonstrances of the offended brother had been: Our Lord answers, Whoever the offender may be, it is at his peril, if he disregards the sentence of the church. For, adds he, *Verily I say unto you*, to you whom I mean by the church, to you my apostles, and in general to you, faithful office-bearers of my house unto the end of the world, *Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* Nor need you be discouraged from the exercise of the discipline and government that I have ordained, by the smallness of your number; for *Again, I say unto you, that if two of you* (the least number that can be said to pass a judicial deed) *shall agree on earth as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father.* By the church, then, we are here to understand a number of ecclesiastical office-bearers come together, and agreeing to exercise the keys of government and discipline which the Lord hath committed to them. The eldership is called the church, "either because a prin-" cipal part is put for the whole, the elders distin-" guished from the people being here called the " church, in like manner as the people distinguished

" from the elders are called the church, in Acts xx. " 28. or because in every matter of importance; " their determinations are accompanied with the " knowledge and consent of the church †." Acts xv 22. *Then it pleased the apostles and elders with the whole church.*

THUS in the rule here laid down for our procedure against an offending brother, it is plainly intimated that the office-bearers, whom the Lord Christ has appointed in his house, ought to exercise the government committed to them, in a joint capacity. Conformable to this rule is the example of the apostles, and other ministers of the word contemporary with the apostles. It belongs to the government of the church to send forth pastors and teachers, and to assign them particular provinces that their labours and their talents may be properly destributed for the most extensive benefit to the church of Christ. We have an example of the joint exercise of this branch of church-government in Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3. *Now, there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers, both Barnabas and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen (who was brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. Now, as they were ministring to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then having fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.* Here is a joint exercise of the powers which our Lord had granted to Simeon, Lucius and Manaen in sending away Barnabas and Saul, or, as the word ἀπολύσαν imports, in loosing them from any engagements they were under to make a longer stay at Antioch; a pattern for the church's imitation to the end of the world. It is true, this was done in compliance with an immediate intimation of the mind of the Holy Ghost. The extraordinary manner of this intimation was suitable to the

† Gillespie's Aaron's rod blossoming, page 406.

ſtate of the new-teſtament church before the model of her conſtitution as delineated in the word, was compleated. But the intimation itſelf correſponds to that guidance which a court of Chriſt, in every ſtep of its procedure, ought ſtill to look for from his word and Spirit. The Lord could eaſily have removed Barnabas and Saul from Antioch as he did Philip from the Ethiopian Eunuch, or in ſome other way, by an immediate interpoſition of his providence; but he rather choſe to order the matter ſo as to give the church an example of the joint exerciſe of miniſterial authority; miniſterial authority, for the impoſition of hands which was uſed in ſending them away was an uſual token of ſuch authority, 1 Tim. iv. 14. and v. 22. 2 Tim. i. 6.

WE have a remarkable example of the keys which our Lord committed to the office-bearers of his church in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts. Certain teachers from Jeruſalem, taught the brethren at Antioch, that except they were circumciſed after the manner of Moſes, they could not be ſaved. This tenet having occaſioned much diſputation, it was determined that Barnabas and Paul with ſome others ſhould go up to Jeruſalem to the apoſtles about this matter. They arrived at Jeruſalem. The apoſtles and elders came together to enquire into the affair. The cauſe is opened: The members of the aſſembly reaſon upon it; they compare word and providence, as the courts of Chriſt, while they act in character, do ſtill: they come to a determination; which, for its judicial authority, is called *a decree of the apoſtles and elders which were at Jeruſalem*, and *a neceſſary burden laid upon the churches*; which, for its importance, put an end to a doctrinal controverſy, directed the practice of church-members, and, upon the matter, cenſured the Judaizing teachers, as *troublers of the church and ſubverters of ſouls*.

THE apoſtle, writing to the Corinthians, gives us a very clear warrant for the joint exerciſe of thoſe powers of binding and looſing which Chriſt has committed as an important truſt to the office bearers of the church. He ſhews us how the church of Corinth was to ſet about excommunicating the inceſtuous perſon, in 1 Cor. v. 3, 4, 5. *For I verily as abſent in the body but preſent in ſpirit, have judged already as though I were preſent concerning him that hath done this deed; In the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, to deliver ſuch an one to Satan for the deſtruction of the fleſh that the ſpirit may be ſaved in the day of the Lord Jeſus.* With this we may compare the apoſtle's direction for the abſolution of the criminal upon his repentance, in 2 Cor. ii. 5, 6, 7, 8. *But if any have cauſed grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to ſuch a man is this puniſhment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwiſe, ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, leſt perhaps ſuch a one ſhould be ſwallowed up with overmuch ſorrow. Wherefore I beſeech you, that you would confirm your love toward him.* On this caſe we would make the two following obſervations.

THE firſt is, That the apoſtle here injoins the church of Corinth to do ſomething in an authoritative manner for the purging out of the old leaven. The ſentence *(that ſuch an one ſhould be delivered over to Satan,* whatever may be the meaning of it) is very deciſive and ſtrongly implies a power and authority in thoſe who paſſed it, over the perſon who was the object of it. And then that ſpiritual authority which belongs to church courts was no leſs apparent in the manner in which the awful ſentence was to be paſſed; it was to be paſſed *in the name and by the power of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* Beſides, the abſolution or removal of cenſure which the apoſtle directed the Corinthians to grant the perſon upon his repentance, was an authoritative abſolution. *I beſeech you,* ſays he, *to confirm your love toward him.*

The Greek word here translated *to confirm*‡, signifies to ratify by public authority, to declare something as a judicial deed. Thus the church of Corinth was now called upon to exert that authority which the Lord had given her.

The second observation is, That there was, in this case, a joint exercise of that authority. The sentence of excommunication was to be pronounced when the people *were gathered together*, by those, no doubt, to whom our Lord confided the powers of binding and loosing, that is, by the office-bearers of the church appointed in his word. The apostle says, *the punishment or censure was inflicted of many*, or (it should rather be read) *of the many*, of the presbytery, or company of elders in whose hands the government was placed. Thus a spiritual authority was exercised in this case; exercised not by one, but by the many.

Of the nature of Church Censures.

WE have seen that Christ has appointed a government in his church and in whose hand he has placed that government. We are now to speak of a very important branch of it; namely censures, or ecclesiastical punishments.

Since the entrance of sin, every society as well as every individual is liable to disorder: nor is the church exempted from the common lot. Nay, considering that the church bears the image of Christ, and that Satan, the world and the flesh are engaged in perpetual war against it; considering that the tares and the wheat grow up together in it, and its professed members are often in reality of the world, lying in wickedness; considering, too, that the church is

‡ The verb κυροω comes from κυρος *authority*, and is used by good writers to signify the ratifying of public deeds.

yet in a ſtate of childhood and weakneſs; when we think of theſe things, we will not wonder that there are diſorders in the church. Hence the neceſſity of cenſures as a remedy againſt theſe diſorders. What cannot be cured muſt be cut off. The old leaven muſt be purged out; for a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. This holy diſcipline is one way in which the church is to evidence her love to Chriſt, to his truths and cauſe, and in which ſhe is to maintain her teſtimony againſt the contrary evils. How ſeverely is the church of Pergamos reproved for her negligence in this particular? Rev. ii. 12, 14, 16. *To the angel of the church in Pergamos, write theſe things ſaith he who hath the ſharp ſword with two edges.—But I have a few things againſt thee, becauſe thou haſt there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam.—Repent or elſe I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight againſt them with the ſword of my wrath.*

THE cenſures of the church muſt be ſpiritual: *for her weapons are not carnal but mighty through God.* They do not produce their effect by bodily pain, but by perſuaſion.—Hence it is a maxim with regard to church cenſures that they ſhould never be corporal puniſhments: to be whipt, or to be fined in a ſum of money are, by no means what the church as a ſpiritual ſociety ought to ſeek—credible evidences of goſpel repentance. Submiſſion to cenſures is not expiatory but evidential: we mean, church-members are by no means, like the papiſts with their penances, to look upon their undergoing the reproofs and corrections of the church as any ranſom or atonement for their ſins; but as manifeſting their faith in the great atonement of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, an atonement to which nothing can be added for all the ſins of all true church-members as well as manifeſting a godly ſorrow for ſin, and a ſincere purpoſe through grace of new obedience.

THESE cenſures are not inflicted by the authority of men, of kings or emperors, but by the authority

of him who, unseen by a blinded world, is the great head of the church, ruling in her, and taking particular notice how his laws and institutions are observed. The only rule according to which these censures are to be administered, is the word. Ministers and elders, as far as they obtain mercy to be faithful, are swayed in every process of censure, by a single regard to the law and the testimony, guarding against the influence of pride, passion, prejudice, and worldly policy: for these are quite unsuitable to the nature of that kingdom which is not of this world. It is only the conformity of censures to the word that can encourage us to ask or expect the blessing of Christ on them; the word from which they derive all their use and efficacy, they being, in fact, no other than a particular application of the word as the rod of Christ's strength in the hand of the church. As the general grounds of censure are moral and the same under both the old and the new-Testament dispensations, so the censures themselves are the same. When our Lord erected the new-Testament-church, he did not institute any new censures; but when the love of Christ was placed more fully in the view of his people by his actual humiliation and obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, so that he had occasion to give them the old precept to love one another under the engaging form of a new-commandment; then he saw it proper to give them instructions suitable to that new commandment, with respect to their behaviour toward their brethren in the important article of church censure. Hence the observance of the rule that our Lord lays down in Matth. xviii. for our dealing with an offending brother, is the only way, in the supposed case, of expressing affectionate regard and genuine friendship. How shall we account for men's opposition to a precept evidently dictated by the most amiable generosity, otherwise than by supposing that as they are little in the practice, so they have lost the knowledge

ef real friendſhip, and that they are naturally *hateful and hating one another?* But the believer whoſe heart the Lord has purified by faith, is enabled to the faithful diſcharge of this as well as of every other duty. 1 Pet. i. 22. *Seeing ye have purified your ſouls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; ſo that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.*

Of the Cenſures previous to Excommunication.

THE degrees of church cenſure are ſuch as theſe; Admonition*, rebuke, ſuſpenſion and excommunication. The firſt of theſe ſuppoſes that the perſon has been overtaken in a fault, or is in danger of being ſo, without implying any charge of either paſt or preſent obſtinacy; for admonition is not adequate cenſure where obſtinacy is in the caſe. There is more frequent occaſion for admonition both private and preſbyterial than for any other cenſure; and it is mentioned as a part of the ordinary work of church-rulers, 1 Theſſ v. 12. *We beſeech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admoniſh you.*

WITH regard to rebuke, it implies a degree of obſtinacy in the perſon rebuked, as it ſuppoſes admonition, doctrinally at leaſt, has been uſed in his caſe, without effect, 1 Tim. v. 20. *Them that ſin,* †

* Mr. Gilleſpie objects to the propriety of calling even Preſbyterial Admonition a cenſure. He ſays it is only "a degree toward "cenſure. Admonition," adds he, "does not exclude from any "church privilege: nor is it a binding, ſince it does not require a "a ſubſequent looſing." It is true, admonition when fallen in with, ends the proceſs; but that is equally the caſe with rebuke. There ſeems to be no impropriety in calling (for it is only about a name that we have any reaſon to differ from that acute and ſcriptural writer) admonition a cenſure, ſo far as it implies a charge of ſomething faulty in the perſon admoniſhed. Aaron's rod bloſſoming, page 478.

† *Sinning* in ſcripture is often put for making a conſtant practice of ſin, or perſiſting obſtinately in it, as in 1 John iii. 6. John viii. 34.

that is, who go on in sin notwithstanding the admonitions that have been given them, *rebuke before all.*

SUSPENSION from sealing ordinances implies a greater degree of obstinacy. Suspension supposes that the person's obstinacy is or has been carried so far that the church sees cause to debar him for a time from her solemn ordinances, not having as yet sufficient evidence of his reformation to judge him disposed or fit to enjoy the fellowship of the saints.

WE have this censure exemplified under the Old Testament in the instance of keeping persons from holy ordinances on account of ceremonial pollution. Thus the unclean were kept back from making any offering in the temple in Jehoiada's time, 2 Chron. xxiii. 19. *And he set porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none which was unclean in any thing should enter in.* If the breach of a ceremonial law thus precluded them from partaking of a holy ordinance; how much more would a breach of the moral law do so? The Lord severely reproves the priests for their neglect of this censure by which a difference is made between the holy and the profane, Ezek. xxii. 25. *Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane; neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.*

CHRIST has given solemn ordinances to the new-testament-church, the profanation of which is to be guarded against as carefully as was that of the ordinances under the old testament. Such ordinances are baptism and the Lord's supper. The terms upon which persons are to be admitted to baptism for themselves and children, are faith and repentance, Acts ii. 28. *Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.* Chap. viii. 36, 37. *The eunuch said, see, here is water; what doth hinder me to be*

baptized? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.

With regard to the Lord's Supper, none are warranted to partake of it without examining themselves; and therefore it must be profaned, if persons are admitted who appear to be utterly void either of capacity or of disposition to set about that exercise, 1 Cor. xii. 28. *But let a man examine himself, and SO let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* Hence the grosly ignorant, or those who are known to refuse to let go some grievous sin, or some grievous error, cannot, in the judgment of charity, be deemed, (though we may think well of their state) in a proper frame for an impartial self-examination, nor of consequence, for partaking of the Lord's supper. For the office-bearers of the church to neglect keeping back the ignorant and the disorderly from the sacraments, is to forget our Lord's prohibition, Matth. vii. 6 *Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine;* and the apostle's solemn charge, 2 Thess. iii. 6. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.* By such neglect they expose themselves to the danger the apostle warns them of, 1 Tim, v. 2. *Be not partaker of other men's sins, keep thyself pure;* compared with 2 John ii. *For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds:* Surely, for an office-bearer of the church to admit persons to sealing ordinances, while he sees them engaged in any sinful course, is to bid them God speed.

We have only one thing more to observe with regard to suspension, which is, that when the grounds upon which a person is kept back from sealing ordinances, are disputed; and having been brought be-

fore a presbyterial court, are by that court, deemed sufficient, the suspension of the person is then judicially declared, which declaring has been called *the less excommunication.*

Of Excommunication.

WE are now to consider excommunication properly so called; the highest censure that the church inflicts. It differs from suspension as exclusion from some of the privileges of the state differs from banishment: For the excommunicated person is considered as cast out of the church, as a heathen man and a publican, as externally at least, in the power of Satan, the prince of this world. A church-member is one called out of the world, that is, out of Satan's territories. But many that are so called, go on frowardly in the way of their own heart: when this frowardness breaks out into an explicit and obstinate rebellion against the laws of Christ's kingdom, it becomes necessary for the church to send the rebellious person back to the world to experience something of the tyranny of his old master, and something of the misery of his wretched subjects; that when the person is come to himself, he may, like the prodigal, be sensible of his folly, and may be brought to return in the way of acknowledging his iniquity, saying, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.*

Of the use of this Censure under the Old Testament.

THE Church had the ordinance of excommunication under the Old Testament.

THIS appears to be sometimes meant by *the cutting off from the people or congregation of Israel*, which we read of so frequently in the law of Moses. This cutting off was a public deed, that the whole congregation of Israel might be instructed and admonished, Levit. xvii. 4, 5. where after an offender is appointed to be cut off, the intention of this punishment is expressed in these words; *To the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open fields, even that they may bring them unto the Lord, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest, and offer them for peace offerings unto the Lord.*

THIS expression is sometimes used to signify the deposing of one from the priesthood, 1 Sam. ii. 33. *And the man of thine, I shall not cut off from mine altar:* Sometimes divorcement, so in Deut. xxiv. 1. a bill of divorce is called *Sepher Cherithuth*, a book or writ of cutting off. There seems to be a real distinction between cutting off from the people or congregation of Israel, and cutting off from the land as in Zeph. i. 3. where it must be understood of cutting off by death.

MANY of the laws inforced by this penalty are of a religious nature, laws the execution of which belonged to the church; such as that against forbearing to keep the passover, Numb. ix. 13. and that against any one partaking of the peace-offering while he was under the ceremonial uncleanness, Lev. viii. 20, 21. Now though cutting off, when annexed to laws the breach of which was punishable by the state might signify natural death, or perhaps banishment; yet we cannot understand it so, when it is annexed to laws the breach of which was punishable by the church alone, because it is not competent to the church, a spiritual society, to take away one's natural life, or to deprive one of his natural rights.

FARTHER, what was the consequence of this cutting off? to suppose that the Israelites were to be put

to death for every offence for which they were threatened with cutting off would multiply their capital crimes beyond all the bounds of credibility: to suppose the law of Moses made every person liable to death, who happened to compound ointment or perfume like those of the tabernacle, or to taste the fat or the blood, or to neglect the sprinkling of the water of separation after having touched any thing that the ceremonial institutions called unclean; to suppose the laws of Moses made these and the like things capital crimes; would be to suppose them, like those of Draco, written in blood. But there is no reason for such a supposition. We have not a single instance, in the history of the Old Testament, of death being inflicted on any of these accounts. Besides, it is observable that according to Levit. vii. 21. he who touched an unclean thing, and so presumed to eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offerings, was liable (without any exemption on account of the circumstance of ignorance) to be cut off from his people. And in the 2d and 3d verses of the 5th chapter, a person is supposed in like manner to have touched an unclean thing; but it is hidden from him: Now, if we only suppose (which is probable enough) that the person, while his defilement is hidden from him, eats of the peace-offering, the latter case will plainly coincide with the former. But we have an expiatory offering prescribed for the latter case, ver. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Hence cutting off appears to have been a censure of the church; since in this instance at least, it was to be prevented by an expiatory offering, an ordinance of the church: for no such ordinance can be supposed to stop the course of justice in the state; though it may well be supposed to prevent an ecclesiastical censure.

We should likewise consider that this cutting off is oftener than once alluded to in the New Testament, where freeing the church from unprofitable members

is treated of. In 1 Cor. v. where the apoſtle ſpeaks of caſting out the inceſtuous perſon, it is evident he had the inſtitution of the paſſover in his eye. He calls Chriſt our paſſover who is ſacrificed for us. He alludes to the ſtrict charge that was given the Iſraelites, that when they were keeping the paſſover, there ſhould be no leaven found in their houſes, when he ſays, *Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump.* In like manner, when he ſays, *Put away from among yourſelves that wicked perſon*, he ſeems to allude to the penalty annexed to the prohibition of leaven: Exod. xii. 15. *Whoſoever eateth leavened bread from the firſt day until the ſeventh day, that ſoul ſhall be cut off from Iſrael.* Beſides, in Gal. v. 12. (where it is evident from the connection that freeing the church from hurtful members is meant) the apoſtle, adopting the language of the Old Teſtament, expreſſes his deſire to have ſome Judaizing teachers that troubled the church *cut off.*

But further, to ſhew that the Old Teſtament church had this ordinance of excommunication, we may take notice of the remarkable example of it in Ezra. x. 8. *They made a proclamation that whoſoever would not come to Jeruſalem within three days, according to the counſel of the princes and of the elders, all his ſubſtance ſhould be forfeited, and himſelf ſeparated from the congregation of thoſe that had been carried away.* In this proclamation the wilful neglect of coming up to Jeruſalem for the purpoſes intimated in the preceding verſes of the chapter, is conſidered as an injury both to the church and to the ſtate. For the injury to the latter, their goods were to be confiſcated; for the injury to the former themſelves were to be excommunicated, or ſeparated from the congregation of thoſe that had been carried away. We need not be ſurprized to obſerve the proceedings of the Jewiſh church and of the Jewiſh ſtate, concur and ſecond one another, ſince it is obvious that, wherever as in Iſrael, church and ſtate have the

same individuals for their members, such concurrence may (and must) frequently happen without prejudicing the independency and distinction of the one from the other.

The Jews were often blamed for misapplying this censure. Now, when a thing is, in any instance, said to be abused, the lawful use of it is established by that assertion; for when the use of a thing is not admitted, we do not say, it is abused, but we say, it ought not to be. The following instances, then, of the unjust exercise of excomunication clearly intimate that there was a lawful use of it in the Jewish church, Isa. lxvi. 5. *Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word, your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.* That a church-censure is meant by the casting out here appears, *first*, from the appellation of *brethren* which is given to those who inflicted the censure; the common appellation of church members; Psal. lxxxiii. 1. Matth. xxiiii. 8. The rulers of the church are to consider themselves as brethren to their fellow-church-members; and never more so, than when they go about the highest acts of that authority which our Lord Jesus Christ has vested in them. There is no such worldly superiority as has place in civil society, to be assumed by any in the administration of the ordinances of Christ. As to any authority given to office-bearers in such matters, it is to be regarded only as the authority of Christ administring the government of his church by their instrumentality according to his word. And *secondly*, This casting out must be understood of a church censure, because the professed, immediate end of it is wholly religious: *They cast you out for my name's sake, and said, Let the Lord be glorified.* Thus the casting out here meant seems to be excommunication. The excommunication of the blind man, John ix. is expressed by the same phrase: *They cast him out.*

THAT was done in consequence of a decree of the assembly of the Pharisees, *that whosoever should confess Jesus to be Christ should be put out of the synagouge:* a censure which was undoubtedly ecclesiastical as it consisted in exclusion from a worshipping assembly. Thus we see that excommunication, or casting out of the synagogue, while our Lord tabernacled on earth. was commonly practised in the Jewish church. Surely had it been a mere human invention, the faithful and true Witness could never have suffered it to pass unnoticed or unreproved.

As our Lord's disciples, who had been always members of the Jewish church, would, no doubt, be accustomed to have an awful sense of the condition of persons under excommunication; so we may reasonably suppose that nothing would be more shocking to them than to be threatened with that censure: This, however, they were to meet with in the course wherein they were engaged, of witnessing for Christ. That this peculiarly heavy trial might not come on them unawares, our Lord takes care to warn them of it, John xvi. 1, 2. *These things have I spoken unto you that you should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues;* that is, they shall excommunicate you. Luke vi. 22. *Blessed are ye, when men shall hate, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach yeu, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of man's sake.* The import of the Greek word rendered *they shall be separate*, says Beza, is, *they shall cast you out of the synagogues:* They shall separate you, like the leper, from their congregation.

Of the use of this Censure under the New Testament.

UNDER the New Testament, this censure, as we hinted before, continues the same; our Lord only directs the use and application of it, agreeably to the new dispensation, in Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17. *Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee an heathen man and a publican.*

WE have already endeavoured to shew that *the church* here means a company of ecclesiastical office-bearers acting in a judicative capacity. We would now only offer two observations on the passage.

THE first is, That the fault or trespass here mentioned, is to be understood of any thing which may justly offend the conscience of a fellow-church-member, and which, consequently, may be a ground of church censure. The fault is not here considered merely as prejudicial to the person or outward estate of a brother; for private faults of this kind, when neither a good conscience, nor the interest of the church are concerned, should rather be passed over in silence than told to the church. Besides, were it merely a fault of this kind, all that a brother could aim at or obtain by dealing with the offender, would be the reparation of his loss: Thus he might gain money or an accession to his estate. But the object our Lord would have us aim at, is the gaining of our

brother, the winning of his ſoul †. It is apparent, therefore, that this fault is ſuch a one as affects the conſcience; it may be a fault that no way hurts the perſon or intereſt of the offended brother. A church-member is offended, in the language of the New Teſtament, who obſerves any thing ſinful in the conduct of a fellow-church-member, Rom. xvi. 21. *It is good neither to eat fleſh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother ſtumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.* 2 Cor. vi. 3. *Giving no offence in any thing, that the miniſtry be not blamed.*

THE ſecond obſervation is, That the cenſure implied in the words, *He ſhall be unto thee an heathen man and a publican*, is the higheſt church cenſure.

WE have already endeavoured to ſhew that there is an exertion of judicial authority in this caſe. Now we want only to know what is here pointed out as the effect of that exertion in theſe words, *Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.* Under the term *heathen* the Jews comprehended all who did not belong to their church and commonwealth; or who were without, as the apoſtle ſpeaks, 1 Cor. v. 12. He gives us a remarkable deſcription of the heathen in Eph. ii. 12. *At that time ye were without Chriſt, being aliens from the commonwealth of Iſrael, and ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe, having no hope, and without God in the world.* Surely, if this is the character of a heathen, we need not ſay any thing further to ſhew that the church inflicts the higheſt cenſure on a perſon, when ſhe accounts him a heathen. As to the publican, it was a character held in the greateſt deteſtation among the Jews, both from their impatience of the Roman yoke, which the Publicans as they collected the taxes, made them daily feel; and likewiſe becauſe the bulk of thoſe who engaged in ſuch an odious employment, were infamous in

† The zeal of true friendſhip, which we ought to evidence for the recovery of a brother that is overtaken in a fault is ſtrongly expreſſed in the original word here uſed, which ſignifies not merely to tell him his fault, but to uſe every argument to convince him of it.

their morals: Hence, in the evangelists, they are constantly ranked with the vilest of mankind: a Pharisee, it seems, could hardly mention a Publican without hinting that he was a great sinner, Matth. ix. 11. *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, why eateth your master with Publicans and sinners?* Surely the church cannot inflict a higher censure than this, which puts a person on a level not only with the heathen, but with those who are worse than the heathen; who are visibly lost to all propriety of conduct.

Our Lord is here directing the behaviour of each particular church-member toward an offending brother; for it is his usual way to bring his word home to the cases and consciences of particular persons. The duty of the New-testament-church in the case of one refusing to hear it, was clear even from the practice under the Old Testament; but particular persons are apt to evade the obligation of duties, while they are only considered with respect to the church in general. It is on this account that Christ does not say, let him be unto the church, but *let him be unto thee.* It is plain however, that the church is included: In the first place, because the reason of the offending brother being accounted a heathen and a publican, that is, neglecting to hear the church, is much stronger and more immediate with regard to the church itself, than with regard to any of its members. If an offending brother is to be a heathen and a publican to a church-member, because he will not hear the church; much more should he be so to the church itself. In the second place, because one cannot justly esteem a fellow-church-member a heathen, unless he is actually *cast out;* that is visibly deprived of the privileges of the church of Christ. But those only are so deprived whom the church esteems heathens and publicans.

We may now go on to consider the charge which the apostle gives the Corinthians with regard to the

inceſtuous perſon, 1 Cor. v. 5. *to deliver ſuch a one to Satan for the deſtruction of the fleſh, that the Spirit may be ſaved in the day of the Lord.* Interpreters have underſtood this paſſage either of a miracle, or of the higheſt church cenſure. That the latter is meant, and not the former, appears from theſe conſiderations.

Our Lord's rule in Matth. xviii. for proceeding againſt an offender, as far as it regards the public procedure of the church, is applicable to this caſe: So that to deliver one to Satan is to account him a heathen and a publican. Why, ſays Beza, ſhould we go to Chryſoſtom, when we may learn from Chriſt himſelf what it is for the church to deliver an obſtinate offender to Satan?

Let us conſider the circumſtances of this delivering to Satan. The Corinthians are directed to ſet about it in the apoſtle's abſence, Ver. 3. *For I verily as abſent in body, but preſent in ſpirit, have judged already*, &c. But the apoſtles were always preſent when they wrought miracles: for they wrought none by proxy, as the apoſtle, ſuppoſing that he was to have wrought one, muſt have done in this caſe: for the cenſure was to be inflicted by the Corinthians, and not by the apoſtle. He, indeed, under the immediate direction of the Spirit, determined what was the duty of the Corinthians in this matter. He does not ſay that he would himſelf purge out *the old leaven;* but he exhorts the Corinthians to purge it out; particularly by putting away that wicked perſon. When the Corinthians were gathered together, this cenſure was to be inflicted of many, ver. 4 and 2 Cor. ii. 6. We have already endeavoured to ſhew that the elders of the church of Corinth, acted jointly, on this occaſion. But there was no reaſon for ſuch a concurrence of many with the apoſtle, had he been propoſing to work a miracle.

The ſame thing is meant by delivering the perſon to Satan as by taking him away, in ver. 2. as by purging out the old leaven in ver. 7, as by putting

away the wicked person in ver. 13. Surely the church can do these things without a miracle.

To what end did the apostles work miracles? For the confirmation of their doctrine and extraordinary divine mission. But the immediate end of the person here being delivered to Satan was *for the destruction of the flesh*, of that depraved nature, that old man which the apostle speaks of crucifying and putting to death, *that the spirit*, the poor soul united to the second Adam, and become a new creature, may be saved in the day of the Lord. The immediate end of the apostles, miracles—which was to confirm the facts they witnessed, concerning the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, and likewise to confirm their own extraordinary mission,—was peculiar to the period of the first propagation of those facts, and of the continuance of that mission. But the end of this censure is the salvation of the soul, the common end of all those ordinary means and ordinances which Christ has appointed the church to observe till he come again. Where the end aimed at by any means is ordinary, we should not without necessity, suppose the means themselves to be extraordinary, or miraculous. Hence it appears that this delivering to Satan is not miraculous but ordinary, and to be practised by the church as occasion requires, since the end of it is common to all the ordinary means and ordinances of the church.

We have another passage where so great a censure is represented in the same terms, as having been used for an end suited to all times and circumstances of the church, 1 Tim. i. 20. *I have delivered Hymeneus and Alexander to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.* It is always the church's concern that her members who have fallen into error, may learn not to blaspheme.

Some have taken the *destruction of the flesh*, for some grievous bodily torture such as Satan brought upon Job. But besides that *the destruction of the flesh*

never can be reſtrained to mean ſuch torture only; it is inſeparably connected with the ſalvation of the Spirit in the day of the Lord Jeſus; which cannot be ſaid of any bodily affliction, as it may, of what the apoſtle calls the crucifixion of the old man. In fine, ſince the Holy Ghoſt foreſaw that caſes like this, in which the cenſure of *delivering to Satan* was directed to be inflicted, would frequently occur in the Chriſtian church, and the effect intended by it, which was the caſting out of a dangerous member, would often be indiſpenſably neceſſary; it is highly improbable, on the one hand, that he would order a miracle to be wrought for a purpoſe which might have been as well effected by an ordinary mean; and on the other, we have good reaſon to believe that, in this remarkable inſtance, he meant to ſet a fair example for the church of Chriſt to follow in ſimilar caſes.

We ſhall only take notice of another paſſage of ſcripture. It is in Gal. v. 11. *I would that they were even cut off who trouble you.* Here the apoſtle has in his eye thoſe Judaizing teachers who had ſo far drawn away the Galatians from the doctrine of juſtification by faith in Chriſt to a legal regard for the ceremonial inſtitutions, that the apoſtle upbraids them in theſe very ſevere terms, *O fooliſh Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you ſhould not obey the truth, before whoſe eyes Jeſus Chriſt hath been evidently ſet forth crucified among you?*

I would that they were cut off. To be excommunicated was, in the language of the ſynagogue, to be cut off.

It is obſervable, indeed, that the apoſtle does not directly enjoin the Galatians to cut them off; he only expreſſes his deſire that it were done. But this manner of expreſſion no way takes off from the obligation the Galatians were under to ſet about cenſuring theſe troublers: it only implies that ſomething hindered them from ſetting about it at that time.

But whence did such hindrance arise? Was it from the number of the offenders, or from the nature of what was laid to their charge? There is no appearance that the hindrance was from either of these causes: if it had been from either of them, we cannot see how the apostle could have entertained such a desire. The truth is, the Galatian church had been so far bewitched by the arts of these corrupt teachers, that she was now almost utterly disabled from exercising against them these powers that Christ had given her: she had not herself, as yet, got free from that heresy, on account of which these corrupt teachers were to be excommunicated.

HAVING thus reviewed some of the warrants for excommunication, we may now endeavour to give some scriptural answer to the following questions.

QUEST. What are the immediate grounds on which the sentence of excommunication proceeds?

ANSW. They are such as these:

1. Something commonly known to be in the principle or practice of a church-member, which is inconsistent with his character as a church-member. Excommunication evidently supposes that inconsistency, because it declares that the person, continuing in his present course, cannot now be considered as bearing the character of a church-member. The inconsistent principle or practice must be commonly known; because excommunication being a public deed, the ground of it should be public, 1 Tim. i. 19, 20. *Holding faith and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander: whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.* 1 Cor. v. 1. *It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.*

2. An evil of an infectious nature, that troubles and corrupts other church-members; for the incura-

bly distempered part of the body must be cut off, to the end that the rest of it may be preserved sound. 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17, 18. *They will increase unto more and more ungodliness: and their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.*— Compared with 1 Tim. i. 20. Gal. v. 12. *I would they were even cut off who trouble you.* 1 Cor. v. 1. *Your glorying is not good: know ye not that a little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump.*

3. An evil which, if spared, must prove ruining or at least extremely hazardous to the person on whom the censure is inflicted. The church ought to go about excommunication in pity to the offender. Gentle methods ought, no doubt, to be tried in the first place, and the issue of them expected with patience and long-suffering. But when it sufficiently appears that gentle methods fail of success, severe ones must not be neglected; the latter as well as the former bearing the stamp of divine authority, and designed for the recovery of backsliding church-members. It is plain that the end of the whole process in Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17, 18. is the gaining of the offender; which supposes that he was in great danger from his obstinacy in the offence. In like manner, excommunication was to be inflicted on the incestuous person, 1 Cor. v. 5. *For the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord;* which implied that his salvation appeared to be in hazard through the prevailing of the flesh.— The case of some persons may be so dangerous, as to require such violence to be used for their preservation as the church uses in excommunication, Jude 23. *And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.*

4. The aggravation of all these circumstances by obstinacy. Obstinacy is undoubtedly the most immediate and rational ground of excommunication, as

the neceſſary effect of it is; that neither the church can be of any uſe to the perſon, nor the perſon to the church: and indeed what other is excommunication, than a ſolemn judicial declaration, that the perſon's behaviour has brought matters to ſo ſad an extremity? for of what uſe can the church be to him, when he will not hear it? and of what uſe can he be to the church, while he is diſpoſed rather to weaken than to help it? In ſhort, by obſtinacy the perſon, as it were, excommunicates himſelf, as by rebellion one throws himſelf out of the civil ſociety againſt which he takes arms. So that, in this caſe, the church's higheſt cenſure is only a judicial declaration of the heinous guilt and dangerous conſequence of what the perſon himſelf does, Matth. xviii. 27. *But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* Titus iii. 10. *A man that is an heretick, after the firſt and ſecond admonition, reject.*

IN fine, ſince excommunication, wherever it is juſtly inflicted, ſuppoſes the offence which is the occaſion of it, to be in the extreme; for nothing but neceſſity can juſtify the uſe of the laſt remedy.—Hence there will hardly occur an inſtance of lawful excommunication which does not proceed upon all the above-mentioned grounds: upon one or two of them chiefly and more expreſly; upon the reſt implicitly at leaſt, and by evident conſequence.—Only it may be obſerved, that as what was at firſt a ſmall offence may, through continued obſtinacy, become, at laſt, a very proper ground of excommunication; ſo even great offences can hardly be conſidered as a ground of the higheſt cenſure without obſtinacy ‡; for how is it reaſonable to excommunicate

‡ The following quotation from ſome anſwers to the queſtions propoſed by the king to the General Aſſembly in 1597, which anſwers Mr. Calderwood calls judicious, may well be conſidered as agreeable to the principles of the church of Scotland in that reforming period: "There can be no greater cauſe of excommunication "than a proud, contumacious heart, that will not hear God's voice "in his kirk; and no crime incurreth the cenſure of excommunication without contumacy." Calderwood's Hiſtory, p. 392.

a person who already gives proper evidence that *he hears the church*, and that he has *learned not to blaspheme?* If the limb bids fair to be healed, a humane physician will not think of amputation. We may grant however, that a crime may be so atrocious in its nature, and so rapid in its infection, that the honour of Christ and the safety of the church may require, that excommunication should be immediately inflicted upon the conviction of the offender, even before the church can have sufficient evidence, whether the person is or is not obstinate after conviction. The usefulness of excommunication, like that of the noble act of Phinehas, may lie much in its infliction being without any delay. Such was the *Summary excommunication* under which the Corinthians were directed to lay the incestuous person. The leaven was ready to leaven the whole lump: it was therefore necessary that the remedy should be immediately applied.

QUEST, 2. If a person of whose state we have formed a judgment of charity, is justly excommunicated; are we bound to reverse that judgment of charity in consequence of his excommunication?

ANSW. We are not in every case.

1. Because we know from scripture, that the Lord sometimes permits, for holy and wise ends, the power of sin to break forth openly in the conduct of some of his own people: that he chastises them for one sin by suffering them to fall into another; as in consequence of denying Christ, Peter was left to curse and swear: and, lastly, that the spiritual eyes of the Lord's people being holden so that they cannot see, they may be very obstinate in a sinful course; as David was in his purpose of numbering the people in opposition to the remonstrances of Joab; nor does the scripture determine this obstinacy to a longer or shorter time. Suppose David had been excommunicated (as on supposition of obstinacy he justly might) for his transgression in the matter of Uriah, we cannot suppose that such as were intimately acquainted with him in the days of his youth, when he tended

his father's flock; when, as is generally thought, he penned the 119th psalm; when he slew the lion and the bear, and conquered the giant of Gath; would have been obliged, in consequence of his excommunication, to look upon themselves as utterly deceived by all the regular and uniform evidences of religion that they had seen about him.

2. Excommunication and the judgment of charity proceed upon widely different grounds. The ground of excommunication is a charge of one or more offences obstinately persisted in; a charge which is confined to these offences, abstracting from all other parts of the person's character or conduct. The person, according to our Lord's rule in Matth. xviii. is to be excommunicated for neglecting to hear the admonitions of the church with regard to the trespass committed against his brother mentioned in ver. 15. There is not a syllable about the offender in any other respect. The same observation holds with regard to the case of the incestuous person, of Hymeneus and Alexander. Indeed, it is contrary to all the rules of judicial procedure, to condemn a person in any other respect, than that of the crime for which he is tried.

But as to the judgment of charity, it has the fullest range: it does not proceed upon two or three instances; but upon whatever knowledge we have of the person, of his regard to both tables of the law, in the general course of his life. The judgment of charity is formed upon an universal survey, as far as our knowledge extends, of the person's behaviour in public and in private, with respect to God, his neighbour, and himself.

The church, in a process of censure, considers the fault that the person is accused of, with relation to the disposition of mind that he discovers, either to justify or condemn it. But it is far otherwise with charity; it considers the fault with respect to the general tenor of the person's conduct; and when it finds

a prevailing regard to the law of God in the latter, it freely forgives the former; for *charity covereth a multitude of sins.*

THE judgment of the church, then, in passing the sentence of excommunication, is not inconsistent with the judgment of charity: but they have different objects.

THE former is a judgment concerning the demerit of a fault: of a fault considered, as the church considers every fault, in connection with the disposition of mind that the person discovers toward it: this judgment is like the sentence of a civil judge, determining the punishment due to any particular crime, according to law.

THE latter, again, is a judgment concerning the general character and behaviour of a person; importing that they are commendable on the whole, and becoming the gospel; a judgment this, which is far from supposing that the person may not be chargeable with faults which may occasion church-censure. The judgment of charity is like the general esteem and affectionate regard that one may retain, upon good grounds, for a friend, even when he must own that that friend has been justly condemned, in a particular instance, by the laws of his country.

ON the whole, it seems evident, that excommunication does not necessarily overthrow our judgment of charity. And tho' the church, regarding singly the person's obstinate persisting in a trespass, may justly pronounce him, in respect of such obstinacy, a heathen man and a publican; though we are bound to evidence our approbation of such a sentence as accompanied with the authority of the Lord Christ, by behaving toward the person agreeably to it, giving him no countenance in his contumacy; lastly, though all this may occasion the deduction of some grains of that evidence in his favour on which our judgment of charity was founded; yet when we take an enlarged view of his life and character, we may see a

ſufficient degree of evidence remaining in his favour, to warrant our looking upon him, in our private judgment, as a Chriſtian indeed, as having the root of the matter in him; however with reſpect to the affair in which he is become obnoxious to the cenſure of the church, we muſt acknowledge that he has gone aſtray like a loſt ſheep. But the Lord will ſeek and find thoſe that are his own; though, it muſt be acknowledged, that the time, the occaſions, and, in a great meaſure, the way of their recovery, are to us impenetrable ſecrets.

QUEST. How far may church-members deal with with an excommunicated for his recovery?

ANSW. It is true, church-members are not to have any ſuch dealings with him as may be conſtrued into a countenancing of his obſtinacy: They are to be particularly careful in this reſpect; that they may not be partakers of other mens ſins, 1 Cor. v. 11. *But now I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with ſuch an one, no not to eat.* 2 Theſſ. iii. 14. *And if any man obey not our word by this epiſtle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be aſhamed.* What follows in the laſt mentioned place will ſerve to direct our conduct toward the excommunicated; *yet count him not as an enemy; but admoniſh him as a brother.* We ſhould uſe every argument to deter him from perſiſting in his obſtinacy; and to invite him back to the communion of the church, and to the enjoyment of her privileges. We ſhould give every proper evidence, as opportunity offers, that we love his perſon, while we hate his vices. If we ought to pray for perſons in bodily affliction, much more ought we to pray for one labouring under a violent ſpiritual diſeaſe: and if we ſhould ſeek and hope that God will glorify himſelf by working deliverance in the one caſe; much more ſhould we ſeek and hope that he will do ſo in the other.

QUEST. Is an excommunicated to be looked upon as without the visible church?

ANSW. It is a plain fact, that he is cast out of the particular church or association of which he was a member: and if the sentence is just, he should be excluded from all other Christian associations: and besides, though every sin persisted in, exposes a man to the greatest hazard; that does so especially, in which the person goes on in opposition to the solemn and judicial warnings of the church of Christ. The sentence being ratified in heaven, the person has nothing to expect in a course of rebellion against it, but manifold tokens of God's anger. But if, by being without the visible church, is meant that, because a person in respect of a particular instance of contumacy, is to be deemed a heathen man and a publican, we must therefore cease to regard him in the general character of a Christian; we must give up all hopes of his salvation, (which, to be sure, is no where to be obtained but in the church of Christ); we must no more entertain a judgment of charity concerning him; we confess that, in this sense, it is by no means necessary to consider an excommunicated as without the church: nay, such a view of his case, however warrantable it may appear from his perversion of this ordinance, is quite contrary to the gracious nature and salutary design of it, as it was appointed by Christ.

QUEST. Should a church proceed to excommunicate offenders, even though their number, their character, or the nature of the offence be such; that, humanly speaking, so high a censure would have no agreeable consequences?

ANSW. It is true, a particular church, as we have observed in the case of the Galatians, may not always have that degree of purity, faithfulness and vigour which is necessary for the adequate application of the censures: she cannot, in this matter, go beyond her measure; that is, her exactness in the infliction of censures must, in the nature of the thing, hold pro-

portion to the degree of her knowledge and profession. The truth is, the caution our Lord directs church-members to observe in reproving one another, should likewise be observed by every particular church in censuring her members, Mat. vii. 5. *First, cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye.* This weakness of a particular church, this defect of purity, or of unanimity seems to be what some pious and eminent writers have had in their eye, when they speak against proceeding to the higher censures against the offences of a multitude; as tending rather to destruction than to edification. Thus the Galatians were so deeply infected with the erroneous doctrine of the judaizing teachers, that the apostle does not command them to be immediately cut off or excommunicated.

On the other hand, so far as the faithful in any church are unanimous and resolute to hold the testimony of Christ; they are warranted to withstand all that oppose them, as Paul did Peter on a particular occasion, to the face; they may admonish, reprove, rebuke, and according to the opposition they meet with, having no respect of persons, on account either of their number, or their high reputation, they may proceed to greater degrees of censure. *For every tongue that riseth against Zion, in judgment she shall condemn.*

Of the History of Excommunication.

Such is the wickedness of many, and the weakness of all, that no church could ever subsist long without a reformation: now, it is one of the first and most necessary steps of reformation to cast out obstinate offenders. We have a very early example of it in the ejection of Cain. The Lord said to

him; *A fugitive and a vagabond ſhalt thou be on the earth:* that is, ſince thou haſt given ſo manifeſt an evidence of thy unbelief, hypocriſy and rebellion againſt my authority in the murder of thy brother, thou ſhalt no more aſſociate with my people, nor partake of the privileges of their ſacred communion. After Cain was caſt out, or, as the ſcripture expreſſes it, *had gone out from the preſence of the Lord*, the church of God was preſerved in the family of Seth; whoſe deſcendants on account of their pure profeſſion of the truth, and in oppoſition to the curſed Cainites, are called *ſons of God;* till, in the time of Noah, profeſſors mingling with the profane, *all fleſh*, at length *corrupted their way*, and provoked the Lord to bring on the univerſal deluge. Only Noah and his family, and in it the church of God were ſaved from deſtruction. Small as the number then was of church-members, it was not long before ſcandal broke out among them. The impiety of Ham diſcovered itſelf in his undutiful conduct toward his father, Gen. ix. 22. It was a crime againſt the cleareſt dictates of reaſon and the light of nature, being contrary to the reverence of children for their parents, which is the foundation of all the good order and juſt ſubordination that has place in ſociety. It therefore behoved Noah to curſe Ham or to caſt him out of the family or church of God. Canaan, indeed, is mentioned as the immediate object of the curſe, either becauſe being Ham's youngeſt ſon, he was the delight of his father; or becauſe he was a witneſs and approver of his father's crime; or becauſe he was to be the firſt of Ham's family who ſhould depart from the church and the pure worſhip of God; or becauſe it would comfort and encourage the Iſraelites, when they underſtood that the war they had to carry on againſt the Canaanites in order to their poſſeſſion and enjoyment of the promiſed land, was with a people who were long before devoted to ſervitude and to deſtruction. In pronouncing this curſe, Noah may be conſidered in two lights: In the firſt place, he was a prophet. Hence he for-

told that Canaan ſhould be *a ſervant of ſervants unto his brethren*. In this reſpect the curſe terminated on Canaan. In the ſecond place, as he was the head, ſo he was the prieſt of his family, and at that time the overſeer of the whole church of God upon earth. He was a preacher of righteouſneſs, and he offered ſacrifices in the name of his family. On account of of this character, we may conſider the curſe of Canaan as an infliction of cenſure upon his father. Ham could not be curſed in his family and poſterity without being excommunicated from the church of God; ſuch a curſe being directly contrary to the promiſe which reſpects all church-members as ſuch indiſcriminately; the promiſe which is to their children as well as to themſelves.

The law of Moſes is plain with reſpect to excommunication, as it directed the Iſraelites to ſeparate from their congregation ſuch as were ceremonially or morally unclean. Thus the leper was to dwell alone; his habitation was to be without the camp. When the law pronounces any perſon unclean or guilty, or one that ſhall bear his iniquity, it is to be underſtood as a direction concerning his excluſion from the congregation of the Lord, either for a longer or a ſhorter time. We have already enquired into the import of cutting off conſidered as an eccleſiaſtical cenſure.

The firſt degree of excommunication among the Jews was called *Niddui* or ſeparation from the aſſembly of the church. By this cenſure the perſon was forbidden to approach within four cubits of his neareſt relations. He continued under the ſentence for thirty days: and if he did not give proper evidences of repentance in that time, it was prolonged to ſixty days, and ſometimes, though ſeldom, to ninety. If it did not appear after all, that the perſon had repented, a heavier cenſure was then inflicted. The Jewiſh writers mention twenty four crimes as the grounds of this cenſure; among which are the follow-

ing: Deſpiſing a Rabbin, a maſter, or a teacher even after his death; calling one's neighbour a ſlave; ſelling one's land to a Chriſtian or a Gentile; bearing witneſs againſt an Iſraelite in a Chriſtian court; making the blind fall. This cenſure correſponded to the ſuſpenſion in uſe among Preſbyterians, by which offenders are kept back from the Lord's table.

THE ſecond degree of excommunication was called *Cherem*, by which the perſon was caſt out of the ſynagogue with curſes and comminations, taken from Deut. xxviii. and other places of ſcripture. A perſon ſo excommunicated, was in the language of the New Teſtament, one excluded from the ſynagogue: It is true, he was allowed to attend the public means of inſtruction in the temple; but then it was in ſuch a way as declared his ſtate of ſeparation from the reſt of the worſhipping aſſembly. Thus when others entered into the temple by a gate on the right hand, the excommunicated entered by a gate on the left. His fellow-church members were prohibited from all intercourſe with him in common life. This excommunication could not be inflicted but by an aſſembly conſiſting, at leaſt, of ten men. This correſponds to the greater excommunication of Preſbyterians; and how far it is warranted by ſcripture has been already ſhewn.

THE third and laſt degree of excommunication was called *Shammatha*. Some derive the word from *Shammah* to exclude or ſeparate: and therefore it is ſometimes uſed to denote the firſt degree of excommunication. Others derive it from *Shamma* the Lord and *Atha* he hath come; that is, (putting the preterite for the future) he will moſt certainly come: This is equivalent to the word uſed in 1 Cor. xvi. 22. *If any man love not the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, let him be Anathema Maranatha.* A Syriack word compounded of *Maran* the Lord and *Atha* he hath come. The excommunication of Alexander the copper-ſmith ſeems to have been of this kind; 2 Tim. iv. 14. and that

of the city of Meroz, Judg. v. 23. Indeed, it does not seem to be so properly a church-censure as an extraordinary denunciation of the divine vengeance against such as are altogether given up of God. It was like a sentence of perpetual banishment, as it cut off all hopes from the excommunicated of ever being restored to the communion of the church. It is contrary in this respect to the nature of the ordinances which Christ hath appointed for the ordinary use of his church: which ordinances, however fatal they may prove to his enemies who rebel against, and abuse them, yet as to their primary and proper intention, are all gracious and salutary.

THE godly discipline of the primitive church *the restoration of which*, says the English liturgy, *is much to be wished)* seems to have been exercised with a considerable degree of purity during the first and second century. About the middle of the second century, a controversy arose between the eastern and the western churches about the time of observing Easter: The churches of the east were for observing it with the Jews on the fourteenth day of the moon; those of the west, on the day of our Lord's resurrection. A vain and foolish controversy, as the ancient historian Socrates justly observes, since there is no command of God for observing Easter at all. Victor the bishop of Rome, entered so warmly into the contest, that, in zeal for the western practice, he precipitately excommunicated Polycrates and the Asiatic churches. This was done in the year 195. Many were offended at the rashness of the Roman bishop, particularly Irenæus bishop of Lyons who reproved him severely for it. The papists, however, endeavour to defend the conduct of Victor; and consider this excommunication as an evidence that he was head of the Asiatic churches, and consequently that he was their universal bishop. But protestant writers justly deny the consequence: For in that age it was not always by superiors that persons were excommunicated; it was

often by equals, and by such as claimed no superiority over the excommunicated. Thus Cyprian excommunicated Novatian the Roman Presbyter; John Patriarch of Antioch excommunicated Pope Liberius. Nay, there are not wanting instances of persons being excommunicated by their inferiors: thus in the year 513, Severus bishop of Antioch was excommunicated and deposed by two bishops who were subordinate to him, Cosmas of Epiphany and Severian of Arethusa. And indeed why may not the church of Christ employ this censure against any one who by his errors and offences openly endeavours to hurt her, whether his rank in life be higher or lower? Surely her discipline should be exercised without respect of persons.

Excommunication, says a historian writing of the second century, was now no other than a separation or casting out of communion; without any such damnation, or such curses with the extinguishing of candles or the ringing of bells, as are now in use with the church of Rome. This like all the other ordinances of Christ, is liable to many abuses and corruptions.

In the first place, It is often misapplied; as it was by those who are spoken of in Isa. lxvi. 5. *Hear the word of the Lord, ye who tremble at his word: Your brethren who hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.* So it was by the Pharisees, John ix. 22. *The Jews had agreed that, if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.* It is indeed the manner of corrupt churches, to harden themselves in their evil course, and to endeavour to discourage the faithful witnesses by the abuse of ecclesiastical censures.

In the second place, The power of excommunication has often been exercised with a rigour altogether contrary to the gracious nature and design of that spiritual discipline which Christ hath appointed in his

word. This abuse of excommunication naturally attends the misapplication of it. For as there is nothing in the ordinance itself to gratify the cruel and persecuting spirit of injustice; so, for that end, it has been often found necessary to add to it, or substitute in the room of it, some hard penances, dire anathemas, fines, outlawries, imprisonments, aud other severities of the like nature. Besides, when Christianity became fashionable, and the church was filled with worldly men, ecclesiastical officers themselves being now become worldly, began to distrust the efficacy of those mild and spiritual censures appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, (censures which indeed are suitable to, and have their proper effect on believers and spiritual men only) and they found something more severe and terror-striking necessary to restrain the promiscuous multitude which had then got into the churches.

The fathers even of the third century carried their severity very far. When a person was excommunicated they appointed him to continue in that state sometimes for three, sometimes for seven years, and sometimes for life. Those who relapsed a second time into the same crime were cast out, never to be readmitted. Such were the first fruits of men's carnal wisdom pretending to improve upon the institutions of Christ.

How the bishop of Rome, aiming at universal monarchy over the church, abused excommunication, employing it as an instrument of tyranny against all who opposed his usurpations; overturning the order of civil society by dissolving the relation between magistrates and their subjects; laying whole kingdoms under interdicts; and passing sentence upon individuals, and sometimes upon whole classes of men, determining their eternal state (thus incroaching on the incommunicable prerogative of the judge of all the earth) is well known to every one who takes a view of the history of Europe from the sixth to the end of the sixteenth century.

THE manner of excommunication in the church of England favours more of the Popiſh than of the Proteſtant religion. As ſoon as an Engliſh biſhop certifies an excommuuication, a writ is iſſued from the chancery directing the ſheriff to take the body of the perſon excommunicated, and impriſon him till he has made ſatisfaction to the church. In conſequence of this ſentence the perſon becomes an out-law; he is diſabled from ſueing any one in an action at law, from being a witneſs, and from every other judicial act. Such a procedure ſuits well with a church which is a creature of the ſtate; but is utterly reprobated in *the kingdom which is not of this world.*

THE cauſe or occaſion of excommuuication in the Proteſtant churches has not only been ſuch crimes as are contrary to the light of nature; but alſo ſuch offences obſtinately perſiſted in, as were plainly ſubverſive of the truth and teſtimony of Chriſt held by thoſe churches. Thus in 1580, when the church of Scotland was contending againſt the uſurpations of Epiſcopacy, the General Aſſembly ordained the biſhops to deſiſt from preaching, from the adminiſtration of the ſacraments, and from every other part of the paſtoral office; till they ſhould receive admiſſion anew from the General Aſſembly: and if they ſhould be found diſobedient to this act, the ſentence of excommunication was after due admonition to be executed againſt them †. Thus in 1586, Mr. Patrick Adamſon was excommunicated for uſurping the function of a biſhop againſt the ordinance of the kirk and to the ſlander of the miniſtry; for diſplaying a banner againſt the whole good order and government of the kirk; and eſpecially for his notorious impugning the ſettled order of the General Aſſemblies and Preſbyteries grounded upon the word ‡.

† Calderwood's hiſtory, page 90.

‡ Item, page 200. It is true, this ſentence was reverſed ſoon after: but that was owing, as Mr. Calderwood ſpeaks, *to the fear and flattery of a court working upon weak and inconſiderate miniſters*, page 212.

Thus had the Judaizing teachers at Antioch whom the Synod of Jerusalem, branded as *troublers of the church and subverters of souls*, made an obstinate opposition to the charitable compromise between the Jewish and Gentile converts; might not that venerable court have cut them off, as the apostle Paul wished to be done in the case of those that troubled the churches of Galatia?

Few events with respect to religion for many years past, have been so much the subject of controversy, of reproach and of commendation, as the censures which were passed above thirty years ago, on some ministers of the Secession for their obstinate attachment to the religious clause in some burgess oaths.

We shall conclude this essay with remarks on two sorts of objections to that excommunication.

First, Some object to it in the following strain: "It is contrary to the Spirit of Christianity to deal "much in excommunications. The Burgher mini- "sters had done nothing to deserve so heavy a cen- "sure: All the crime they could be charged with, "was, That they mistook the meaning of an oath. "They were eminent ministers and holy men: it was "therefore a horrid profanation to deliver them up "to the devil. As these censures were cruel and un- "just, so they were without effect: These ministers "preached; they lived and died as well as if no such "censures had ever been passed."

It is obvious, that this common-place declamation is directly contrary to what we have already advanced as the doctrine of the scriptures with respect to excommunication. From which we may deduce this truth: "That in every case in which a "church is in a capacity to exercise the power of dis- "cipline committed to her by Christ, and in which "she has the grounds to proceed upon, laid down "in scripture for excommunication, she may war- "rantably pass that censure without respect of persons "and without fear of consequences." We have en-

deavoured to ſhew that excommunication is altogether ſuitable to the mild ſpirit of Chriſtianity; that the Aſſociate Synod, having preſerved its conſtitution inviolate, had a right to exerciſe its judicial authority in the infliction of cenſures, as well as in other inſtances; and that, in the circumſtances of the Seceſſion from the church of Scotland, it is a very aggravated offence to take or to juſtify the taking of the religious clauſe in ſome Burgeſs Oaths.

In the ſecond place, Others argue againſt the excommunication of the brethren in a very different ſtrain: "We are convinced, ſay they, of the unlawfulneſs of ſwearing the religious clauſe in ſome Burgeſs Oaths: We are ſatisfied as to the conſtitution of the Aſſociate Synod: We have no doubt as to the authority of that court to exerciſe the diſcipline of the church. But ſtill we cannot ſee the propriety or expediency of proceeding ſo quickly, as was done, to lay the brethren under the greater excommunication. We fear there was too much paſſion and alienation of heart on both ſides for a proper uſe of thoſe means, ſuch as joint prayer and mutual conference, which are previouſly neceſſary in order to that awful cenſure. Beſides the neglect of thoſe previous means with which we fear both parties were in ſome degree chargeable, we apprehend that the convulſed ſtate of the church at that time, required lenity, and rendered it unſeaſonable to come to extremity."

People ought to be at liberty to expreſs their opinions (provided they do ſo with candour) on particular ſteps of eccleſiaſtical adminiſtration; the ſteps, we mean, which cannot be conſidered as belonging to the ſyſtem of principles which is denominated, *The Seceſſion Teſtimony;* which are not reckoned among the terms of communion; and which are of that ſort of public meaſures, that a ſociety muſt allow a diverſity of opinion concerning them, otherwiſe either ſincerity or ſocial union would be at an end: Hence though we cannot give a deciſive anſwer to

these objections, we may offer an observation or two on the subject.

In the first place, It deserves our consideration, supposing the grounds of any sentence of excommunication to be sufficient according to the word of God, how far the validity of that sentence is affected by the manner in which it is passed. Were every degree of passion, prejudice, or other unsuitable disposition that church officers are liable to, or discover in the exercise of spiritual discipline, to render it null and void; there would be no lawful exercise of it at all. It is no certain proof that a person is in an error, that he delivers his opinion in a passionate and disagreeable manner. Though his manner is wrong, his matter may be right. There is no just reasoning from the one to the other. Thus we may grant there was much wrong in the manner of proceeding against the brethren, and yet maintain that the sentence is valid and obligatory upon them.

In the second place, If we ask, When is excommunication expedient? It will be answered, when it tends to edification and not to destruction: but the question still recurs, when is it for edification? Is it when it increases the number of visible church-members? No, for in our times, the faithful exercise and wholesome severity of church-discipline never fails to diminish their number. Is it when it is evidently necessary for the promoting of holiness and of peace among church-members? But this can be determined no otherwise than by examining how far it serves to promote the stedfastness and purity of the church in her profession of the truth as it is in Jesus; for that is the true scriptural way of edifying her members in peace and holiness: The seed of Christ *keep the commandments of God in the way of having the testimony of Jesus*, Rev. xii. 17.

We need not say any thing here concerning the importance of the grounds upon which the excommunication proceeded. We have only to observe,

that if these grounds were of real importance, the more trivial they were in the eyes of the world, and even in the eyes of many church-members, the excommunication was the more necessary: the reason is, that it is one principal end of excommunication to impress church-members with a suitable sense of the particular evil which is the cause of it †.

† The ground of this censure was the same with that on which the Associate Synod had maintained its constitution at the breach, and asserted its right to exercise the government and discipline of the church. How can we suppose that the same ground was sufficient to warrant the exercise of church discipline in general, but insufficient to warrant the exercise of it in a particular instance? We speak of the ground of the excommunication, abstracting from the manner of proceeding upon that ground.

It is said, that the brethren desired conference with some members of the Associate Synod, as a mean of healing the breach that had taken place. But before we can justly blame those members for not complying, we should examine what sort of conference was required: whether it was a conference about falling from the testimony which had been given against some Burgess Oaths; or about giving up the the lawfulness of the constitution of the Associate Synod. A free people should not once allow themselves to hear a proposal which appears to call their liberty in question; much less are Christians to suffer themselves to be tampered with to forsake the Lord's way in which they *walk at liberty*. The ministers, therefore, did right in rejecting the proposed question, if it was to proceed upon an allowance of the religious clause of some Burgess Oaths or upon the nullity of the Associate Synod: But if it was to proceed upon neither of these; but was merely in order to bring about a better understanding between the parties; the proposal should have been accepted.

ESSAY VIII.

Of the Religious Character of the Times.

THE principal religious characters of the preſent age ſeem to be, the faſhionable Deiſt, the Temporizer, the ſelfiſh Devotee, the Waverer, and the ſerious but deſponding Chriſtian.

I. THE *Deiſts*. They own the being of GOD, but deny the divine authority of the ſcriptures, or that the Bible teaches the only way in which a ſinner can be ſaved. The cauſes of the plentiful growth of Deiſts, ſeem to be the following.

1. IGNORANCE. Such as reject Chriſtianity without having read the Bible with attention, or without having attained any diſtinct knowledge of its doctrines; ſuch as think no credit is due to the bible becauſe ſome of the facts have been repreſented as contradictory to one another, or ſet in a ridiculous light; ſuch as have ſatisfied themſelves with conſidering theſe parts only which appeared the moſt liable to exception without ever having taken, or ſeriouſly endeavoured to take, a connected view of the whole: all theſe are Deiſts from ignorance.

2. PRIDE. Thoſe who, accounting their own reaſon and virtue ſufficient to direct their ſteps and ſecure their happineſs, ſee no need of a revelation for theſe purpoſes; who reject revelation becauſe it is not communicated to as many as they think pro-

per, becauſe the ancient heathens or modern Indians are ignorant of it; who will not yield their aſſent to the doctrines of it, becauſe they are doctrines which reaſon could never diſcover, and when diſcovered, which it never can account for; who, in fine, reject the bible, becauſe it expoſes the weakneſs and depravity of human nature: all theſe are Deiſts from pride.

3. Vicious habits and diſpoſitions in general. Thoſe who think ſome other plan of morality more conducive to the happineſs of man than that which is laid down in the ſcriptures; who imagine the ſpiritual exerciſes and enjoyments recommended by the bible, are vain or unattainable; who fancy there is no need of any other guide in morals than their own taſte, or feelings; who would rather have the ſcriptures falſe than their own depraved inclinations mortified; who condemn the bible, becauſe the bible condemns them: all theſe are Deiſts, for the ſake of their vicious habits and diſpoſitions.

To theſe cauſes of infidelity, beſides, what is the root of them all, the natural enmity of man's heart againſt the purity of the ſcriptures, we may add, the works of ſome elegant writers, and the example of the greater part of thoſe who pique themſelves on the ſuperiority of their taſte, their politeneſs, or their high rank. We do not think that infidelity in itſelf, is favourable to genius or to good taſte; for it is truth alone that gives vigour to the one or ſtability to the other. Senſible of this, ſuch writers on the ſide of infidelity as are any way remarkable for theſe qualities, have always taken care, in the firſt place, to acquire a reputation by illuſtrating ſome uſeful truths, which are indeed perfectly agreeable to Chriſtianity; but which they have attempted, by oblique reflections or by ſatyrical hints. to contraſt with ſome part of Chriſtianity.

It is another cauſe of the prevalence of Deiſm in the preſent age, that many who are called Chriſtians,

do not receive the truths and ordinances of the bible as from God: they consider them as harmless things belonging to the religion of their country; but they cannot see it any way necessary to adhere very strictly to them, or to engage in the zealous defence of them. They do not mean, for their part, *to suffer for the cause of Christ.* It is enough for them to hold a kind of system of natural religion, which they have framed for themselves. Accordingly they are left to amuse themselves with their miserable schemes of religion, while God, in his righteous judgment, suffers them to become more and more blind to the evidences of Christianity.

THE general prevalence, and the open avowal of Deism presage the approach of our national ruin. The Sadducees, as one justly observes, never became very numerous among the Jews, till a little before their final destruction.

IT was a fine summer morning, when Lorenzo took a turn with his friend Lælius in some gardens, which had been laid out with the greatest taste, and which, in this season, afforded the highest regale of beauty and fragrance to the senses. They walked until they came to an eminence where they had a full prospect of Lorenzo's estate; on which he began to congratulate himself and entertain his friend with an account of the improvements he had made, the profits he had reaped or expected to reap, and the refined pleasures which, he said, he tasted: "These, "these are solid enjoyments: these are elegant satis- "factions." Lælius, thinking he was too much transported with such transitory things, and that he was too much like the covetous wretch who said to himself, *Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years*, could not forbear interrupting his reverie, and suggesting a plain, but faithful and friendly admonition in the following manner.

LÆLIUS. You seem then, Lorenzo, to place your happiness in the gaieties of life, and in the solid enjoyment, as you term it, of a plentiful fortune; yet in the moments of reflection, you must think how uncertain this happiness is; how quickly it may be interrupted, by the spleen, by sickness, by a thousand accidents; and, when you die, how unavoidably it must be ravished from you for ever.

LORENZO. My conduct has ever been such, that I have nothing to reproach myself with: it has been my greatest pleasure to do good to my fellow-creatures.

LÆL. Have you, indeed, taken an impartial view of your past life? On the strictest enquiry, have you found that you never entertained a thought, nor spoke a word, nor did an action dishonourable to God, or contrary to his law? If you are guilty in a single instance, God may justly be displeased with you for that instance. This being the case, if you do not consider it, you shew a disregard and contempt of the injured honour of that INFINITE BEING, on whom you depend for every breath you draw, and who is able to punish you in such a manner and in such a degree as is far beyond all your present conceptions.

LOR. The supreme being is daily loading me with his favours: he gives me all things richly to enjoy: as he is now, so will he prove in a future state, my friend.

LÆL. Nothing is more essential to our idea of God than this; That he is one who delights in virtue or in righteousness. Hence his favour is annexed to virtue, and his hatred to vice: which hatred must be according to the degree of its object. But how common is it to see the man of distinguished wickedness arrayed in scarlet, and faring sumptuously every day; while he who is virtuous, or at least far less vicious, is clothed in rags and oppressed with poverty: a convincing proof, that it is, by no means, in-

proportion to the abundance and variety of a perſon's outward enjoyments, that he ſhares in the favour of God. The ſupreme Diſpoſer of human affairs is often ſeen to indulge a great degree of proſperity to thoſe very ſtates which he has doomed to a ſudden aud ſignal deſtruction: witneſs Carthage, Tyre, Babylon. Hiſtory affords examples without number. In like manner, a perſon may be all his days in affluent circumſtances, and yet not be certain but that, in a future ſcene, he may appear to have been all along an object of God's diſpleaſure. Even in the ordinary courſe of providence, we cannot certainly conclude from our proſperity to day, that we ſhall be proſperous to-morrow: far leſs can we infer from the kindneſs of providence in this life, that we ſhall not be miſerable in the life to come.

LOR. It ſeems moſt reaſonable to conceive of God as a mild and benevolent Being, who wants his creatures to be happy: ſure then he does not obſerve all our faults with extreme ſeverity.

LÆL. Let us try to conſider the matter impartially. You will grant that God has appointed laws to the moral as well as to the natural world. A law ſuiting a reaſonable creature muſt have rewards and puniſhments annexed to it. Now the ſame goodneſs of God that preſcribed theſe laws, that delights in the obedience given to them, that deſires in rational creatures the perfection and the happineſs with which that obedience is connected; even that very goodneſs muſt ſee to the execution of theſe laws; muſt be averſe from viewing the diſobedience of theſe creatures; and muſt, at leaſt, withhold every mark of favour from the diſobedient. Conſider, Lorenzo, that his favour is our life, and to experience the loſs of it, muſt be as death. Beſides, we ſee a great deal of miſery actually taking place among mankind. It is inconſiſtent with all that we underſtand of God's wiſdom and power, to ſuppoſe that this or any other thing takes place againſt his will. Whatever miſery, therefore, we ourſelves or

our fellow-creatures endure, we may be certain, that neither the appointment nor the infliction of it is inconsistent with the goodness of God.

Lor. The miseries of the present life are only for the chastisement and correction of mankind.

Læl. Be it so; yet the fact shews one thing incontestibly, *i. e.* That there are reasons which may make it agreeable to the goodness of God, to inflict punishment: you have mentioned one of these reasons: but for any thing we know, there may be others of equal or of greater importance: others which, for any thing nature can say with certainty, may render it necessary that we should be punished at last in a manner of which we have no example in the present state.

Lor. Your reasoning is rather too metaphysical.

Læl. It is an argument of the depravity of human nature, and of our indispensible need of a divine revelation, that men are so much indisposed to give any serious or suitable attention to subjects which a small reflection may convince them, are, at least, very likely to prove of everlasting consequence. Indeed, they might attain to certainty in matters of religion, by a far less degree of diligence and application of mind than what they often bestow on philosophical trifling and ingenious amusement.

Lor. The modes of religion are various: the substance of it is the same in all ages and in all countries. I am of the same opinion with the poet:

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.

Læl. But when may one's life be justly said to be in the right?

Lor. When he does to others as he would be done by; when he assists or instructs them; when he acknowledges and corrects the faults himself may have fallen into.

LEL. But is it no part of a good life to have a chief regard to God who gave us our being and all our enjoyments? The benefits that men receive from one another lay them under obligations to do good to one another. But what are all these obligations compared to those we are under to him who is the *God of our life and the length of our days.* Trust me, Lorenzo, unbiassed reason will pronounce your life entirely in the wrong, unless you are habitually remembering God; unless you fear and love him; unless you seek the knowledge of his will, walk according to it, and do all you can to make others esteem him. Hence we see the truth of what the poet says concerning a person's faith,

His can't be wrong whose life is in the right;

taking one's *life* here to signify our inward dispositition as well as our outward behaviour; our regard to God as well as to man: for if one's life, so understood, is in the right, it must not proceed from a wrong, but from a right faith; that is, from just views of God as well as a proper concern for our neighbour's welfare; views, by the way, which we have not heard that any of mankind ever obtained otherwise than by that revelation which we have in the scriptures. Besides, when we speak of what is acceptable to God, our secret principles and motives impenetrable to our fellow-creatures, are vastly more to be attended to than our overt actions: the first thing to be enquired, is, whether we are actuated by the love of God, by a willing submission of heart to his authority, by a single regard to his glory? and then, Whether our hearts are free from hatred, envy, vain-glory, or any other inordinate affection toward our neighbour? Whether we love our neighbour for God's sake? If we are deficient in these or the like internal principles of action, it is a poor vain imagination for us to think our life right before God, *who searcheth the heart.*

As to your observation, that the different modes of religion are, in substance, all the same; how far

the various forms of superstition in different ages and countries may be resolved into the same general principles, might be a subject of curious and not unprofitable enquiry: but without any elaborate disquisition, it is plain that Christianity is essentially different from all other religions, and even from natural religion itself.

LOR. You surprize me, Lælius;—Christianity seems, indeed, to be more refined and free from superstition than the religion of the ancient Greeks and Romans, or that of the Mahometans; but, by the confession of many eminent writers on the side of Christianity, it is only an improvement on natural religion.

LÆL. Christianity is not contradictory to pure Theism or natural religion, as it certainly is to idolatry and superstition. But Christianity discovers much concerning God and concerning the way of salvation from sin, which is far beyond the sphere of what is commonly called natural religion. That religion never taught any thing like the doctrine of God manifesting himself, and communicating his favours to poor sinners by a Mediator, who is himself the Most High God. To a mere moral philosopher nothing can appear more absurd than this proposition; *That God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.* Neither Socrates, nor Plato, nor Aristotle was known to use such language. The philosopher would have but an obscure notion of *God reconciling the world to himself*: he might conjecture that it was a strange, out-of-the-way expression for *reclaiming mankind from vice.* But when he came to read, *not imputing their trespasses to them*, he would be apt to ask, whether it were not downright nonsense? For to whom should a person's own trespasses be imputed but to himself? At best, he must look upon it as a paradoxical, harsh and improper phraseology for a very plain idea, that of *pardoning sin, or forbearing to punish it;* though still he would think *pardoning* the world but a very poor way

of *reclaiming* it. Above all, the very first words of the sentence, *God is in Christ*, would absolutely puzzle and confound him. He would not be able to conceive how God can be in Christ; or how God, by being in Christ, reconciles the world to himself. Indeed, Lorenzo, the duties that are most commonly inculcated in the new Testament are utterly unintelligible on the supposition that they are, in substance, no other than what we are informed of by natural religion; such as these; *Putting on Christ, receiving him, walking in him, praying in the Spirit, putting off the old man, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God.* Were Christianity materially the same with natural religion, men might attain a sufficient knowledge of it by the diligent use of their natural faculties without any special or supernatural illumination. But this is contrary to the scripture itself, 1 Cor. xi. 14. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Mat. xiii. 11. *It is given to you,* said Christ to his disciples, *to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.* Mat. xvi. 17. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood* (an expression denoting whatever naturally and essentially belongs to man) *hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven.*

FARTHRE, Lorenzo, Christianity affords a vastly more glorious display of the divine perfections than the religion of nature. That religion says, God is so just that he will give every one his due. But, says Christianity, He is so just, that rather than let the sins of those whom he had determined to save, pass with impunity, he chose to make his own Son suffer for their sins; for *it pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to grief, and to make his soul an offering for sin.* The religion of nature says, God is so true, that he never will deceive his creatures: but Christi-

anity declares, that God is so true and faithful, that rather than one jot or tittle of his word should fail, he would not spare the Son of his love, but made him sin and a curse though he knew no sin, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. In the same manner, we might go on to shew how much superior the testimony of revelation is to that of nature with respect to the other perfections of the divine nature.

LOR. You speak so mystically that I cannot understand you.

LÆL. I endeavour to be plain. Take heed, Lorenzo, lest, while you seem not to understand revelation, you be, in reality despising it. You are at least a Theist; you believe a God: Consider that you cannot shew a greater contempt of him than by rejecting the only revelation he has given to mankind.

LOR. I have heard of a great many systems of religion; each of which, according to its votaries, came down from heaven; while some find their account in propagating pious frauds.

LÆL. Do you mean the systems of the ancient philosophers? They ascribed their pretended wisdom, not to the kindness of heaven, but to their own industry and penetration. So well did they succeed in exposing the vanity and absurdity of one another's systems, that the perusal of all their writings would only serve to convince us that they were all in the wrong. Besides, there was never a philosophical system so much adapted to the capacities and situations of the bulk of mankind, as in any age or country to become the popular belief. Do you mean the systems of the Bonzes in China or of the Magi in Persia? These claim no other original than the authority of Fohi or Zoroaster: nor do we learn that Zoroaster or of Fohi pretended to be favoured with any divine revelations: they enjoined their observances on their followers in their own names only. Or do you mean the system of Mahomet? Consider the life of Mahomet: Consider his man-

ner of propagating his religion: review the trivial conceits, the inconſiſtencies, and the palpable falſehoods of his Koran; and then ſay, whether Mahometaniſm will bear a compariſon with the religion of the Bible. Beſides, by acknowledging the authority of our JESUS as a prophet, Mahomet has for ever overthrown his own. Or farther, with ſome wits of modern days, would you prefer the traditions of the untutored Indians, who expect at their death to be wafted to certain green iſlands where they ſhall ſit under the ſhady trees and drink wine out of the ſkulls of their enemies; and as they have no idea of rational ſociety, their dogs ſhall bear them company?—But why ſhould we inſiſt? Know you a compoſition that bears ſuch evident marks of a divine original as the ſcriptures? Or while it ſpeaks in the name of the only living and true God who created heaven and earth, carries ſuch conviction of its truth to the conſcience?

FALSE religions become ridiculous, but Chriſtianity becomes more venerable by the progreſs of true knowledge. Every ſcience atteſts the ſuperior excellence of the Bible. For example, geography gives its teſtimony to the accuracy of ſcripture narration by ſhewing how exactly it correſponds to the true ſituation of places: Ancient hiſtory, where it is not plainly fabulous or inconſiſtent with itſelf, agrees with that of the Old and New Teſtament; while modern hiſtory verifies what is there foretold. Natural philoſophy ſhews how juſtly the ſyſtem of the univerſe or the productions of the earth are alluded to or deſcribed in ſcripture. In fine, true criticiſm points out the propriety, the majeſtic ſimplicity, the native elegance, and pathetic energy of the inſpired writings †.

† The claſſical writers of antient Greece and Rome, as might be expected from the time in which they lived and from the ſubjects of which they treat, mention many of the facts recorded in ſcripture, and throw light upon many paſſages of it by the view they give us of the political ſtate of nations, of antient languages, cuſtoms and

With regard to perſons finding their account in promoting particular ſyſtems of religion, it may be ſufficient to obſerve that it was not Chriſtianity itſelf, but the abuſes and corruptions of it that ever ſerved the purpoſes of avarice and ambition. Read the Bible, and you cannot fail to ſee how unjuſt it is to blame Chriſtianity for the pride, for the aſpiring or intereſted views of too many prieſts and prelates.

Lor. I am perplexed with the different readings of the Old and New Teſtament; with the different opinions as to the degree of inſpiration under which the ſacred penmen wrote; and with the different interpretations of many paſſages.

Læl. The ſpots in the ſun's bright orb hinder him not from communicating light and heat to the world: Nor will the variations of different copies of the ſcriptures hinder them from being profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and inſtruction in righteouſneſs. None of the leading and diſtinguiſhing truths of Chriſtianity depend upon a word, but are fully diſplayed and frequently repeated through the whole Bible: ſo that we can be at no loſs to find them in the moſt incorrect copies and in the worſt tranſlations. No body queſtions whether Homer's genius and knowledge of human nature appear in the Iliad and the Odeſſey; or Virgil's judgment and delicacy of taſte in the Georgics and the Eneid; though the variations in the reading of thoſe poems are incomparably greater and more numerous than the variations in the reading of the ſcriptures. And ſhall we ſuppoſe that a few blunders of a tranſcriber of the Old and New Teſtament may hinder us from diſcerning the authority, holineſs, wiſdom, power and mercy of God ſo peculiarly diſplayed in the ſacred pages? Surely, the character of God is more uniformly and ſtrongly marked in his word, than the

manners. It is, therefore, a remarkable diſpenſation of Providence that ſo many of their productions have been preſerved, and in almoſt every civilized country, are accounted the ſtandards of taſte and of elegant compoſition.

characters of Homer and of Virgil in their poems. Indeed, there is no compariſon; for the manner of expreſſion or of arrangement is almoſt all that characteriſes the poets; whereas God's word is characteriſed by the great and glorious things that it reveals. Farther, the ſame wiſdom and goodneſs of God that beſtowed this revelation on mankind, we may aſſure ourſelves, will take care, by a ſpecial providence, to preſerve it in ſuch purity as is neceſſary to make it anſwer the end for which it was beſtowed. Hence we have good reaſon to believe, not only that the various readings are few and moſtly immaterial; but likewiſe that, in every inſtance, the true reading is preſerved ſomewhere, and may be found out by a careful collation of copies, by attending to the ſcope and connection, by obſerving the analogy of faith, and by the uſe of other means.

As to the degree in which the penmen of ſcripture were inſpired, it is ſufficient for us to believe that the matter which they ſpoke and wrote, as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt, was only what was neceſſary to conſtitute the perfect rule of the church's faith and practice; and that they expreſſed that matter, under the ſame infallible guidance, by the fitteſt words which the language they wrote in could ſupply them with. How far the Holy Spirit made uſe of the particular natural genuiuſes of the penmen in thoſe divine compoſitions is rather a matter of curioſity than of importance or edification.

WHY are you ſtumbled at the miſinterpretation of the ſcriptures? The works of creation and the ways of providence are often miſinterpreted as well as the ſcriptures; ſo that this, like too many of the objections of Deiſm, will ſerve the cauſe of Atheiſm as well. Turn away your attention from jarring interpretations of the ſcriptures to the ſcriptures themſelves: there you may find ſuch plain paſſages as he that runs may read and underſtand. And if you ſeek in earneſt to increaſe in this which is the beſt kind of

knowledge, you will by degrees obtain more and more satisfaction as to the meaning of passages that are more obscure. Then instead of being stumbled at the various interpretations of authors, you will be enabled to make a proper use of them.

LOR. It is not improbable, but that God may be delighted with the various manners of worshipping him which divide the world.

LÆL. The love of variety is ownig to the imperfection of our nature. Wanting satisfaction in our selves, we look for it in other things: missing it in one of these things, we seek it in another: disappointed in our expectation from that, we have recourse to a third, and so on without end. Carried to excess, this passion is exceedingly hurtful: it is a levity of temper which unfits one for any useful employment or any laudable pursuit: a passion, surely, never to be ascribed to the supreme Being who is necessarily happy in the contemplation of his own perfections.

As we know not what is acceptable to God, unless he teach us; as both the manner and matter of our worship should express our regard to his supreme authority; so it is most reasonable to believe that he hath himself appointed the manner in which he is to be worshipped. If this be the case, then worshipping God in any other way than he has appointed, instead of doing him acceptable service, must be a transgression of his law; and a transgression so much the more aggravated that it is committed under the pretext of paying him homage. And shall we consider the supreme Being as delighted with the variety of ways in which his creatures trample on his law and commit rebellion?

LOR. Our religion is for the most part no other thing than the prejudice of education.

LÆL. What then? Do you mean that it is a sufficient reason for dropping our religion, that we have been taught it in our infancy? This can be no rea-

ſon againſt Chriſtianity, or indeed againſt any thing at all, being a circumſtance compatible alike with truth and with falſehood. The word prejudice may be applied to any opinion whether true or falſe which we are led to entertain without rational conviction. The real errors in which we are educated are always prejudices as long as we adhere to them; becauſe we relinquiſh them as ſoon as we begin to reaſon right about them. On the other hand, even the truths in which we are educated may be called prejudices while we are ignorant of the reaſons of them; but they become our genuine principles when thoſe reaſons are diſcerned. Properly ſpeaking, prejudices reſpect the manner in which perſons aſſent to propoſitions, not the propoſitions themſelves.

LOR. I am confounded whenever I turn my thoughts to the ſubject of religion: I am apt to ſay with Cato, that—Shadows, clouds, and darkneſs reſt upon it.

LÆL. The reaſon why moſt people find ſo little ſatisfaction in their enquiries concerning religion is that they ſet about them with levity of mind. Religion will never do for an amuſement: It is a vaſtly more agreeable recreation to play at nine-pins, than to read our modern theories and natural hiſtories of religion. If ever you would have any ſolid, ſatisfying views of religion, you muſt look upon yourſelf as a poor and miſerable creature; you muſt have a felt conviction that none of the creatures, neither the neceſſaries nor the conveniences of life, nor your perſonal qualities, nor your friends and relations can help and relieve you; but God Almighty can: he can eaſily make himſelf known to you as your refuge and your portion. The great, the tremendous queſtion is, Whether he *will* do ſo or not? The ſcriptures alone, (I declare it without the leaſt heſitation) in proportion as you diſcern more clearly the internal evidence of their divine authority; and as you become more acquainted with the *great things of*

God's law; the ſcriptures will give you an anſwer more and more ſatisfying, clear and comfortable.

CONSIDER yourſelf as in the ſight and preſence of God who knows the heart, and who is in a little to be your judge; and then aſk your own heart the important queſtion, whether you have diligently peruſed the ſcriptures; and having fairly examined the external and eſpecially the internal evidence of their divine authority; whether you are ſatisfied in your conſcience that there is nothing at all in it? Aſk your own heart, whether you are abſolutely ſure that the account given in ſcripture, of the entrance of ſin among mankind, of the preſent deplorable ſtate of human nature, and of the manifeſtation of God's holineſs and mercy in the ſalvation of ſinners by a divine Redeemer, be all a cunningly deviſed fable?

OBSERVE the preſent ſtate of the world; ſearch antient and modern hiſtory, and ſee whether the characters of men and the courſe of providence be not a continued fulfilment of the ſcriptures. Compare, eſpecially, the hiſtory of the church with the deſcription of her lot in the Bible. Conſider whether the ſame Almighty hand that made and that preſerves the world, be not manifeſt in the erection, in the propagation, in the defence, and in the various deliverances of the church.

SERIOUSLY conſider the teſtimony of many thouſands (which could not be refuſed in any civil matter) concerning their experience of God manifeſting himſelf to them and holding communion with them according to and by means of the ſcriptures. You cannot reaſonably call them diſhoneſt, without direct and poſitive evidence in oppoſition to their teſtimony: but ſuch evidence it is impoſſible to produce. It would be raſh and abſurd in the extreme to ſay they were only perſons of a weak or diſordered judgment. Beſides, they had the beſt opportunity of judging, whether living in the faith of the ſcriptures, or living in unbelief be the beſt and the moſt com-

fortable kind of life; becauſe they had tried both; which no infidel ever did.

IT is common with infidels to conſider religion only with reſpect to the enjoyment of the preſent life, and to like or diſlike it as it appears to ſuit or to be inconſiſtent with temporal proſpects and pleaſures. On the contrary, when you ſet about enquiring what religion you ſhall embrace, I would have you annihilate the preſent life, which in this enquiry can only ſerve to prejudice or pervert your judgment; and conſider yourſelf as on the point of being called before God's awful tribunal; on the point of entering into an eternal and unchangeable ſtate. It is true, godlineſs is for our preſent comfort; but in order to our knowledge of this, it is firſt neceſſary to know that it has the promiſe of the life which is to come.

MAKE trial of Chriſtianity. You are often propoſing your doubts and difficulties to your fellow creatures: you ſhould rather be employed in ſeeking to know God *your maker who giveth ſongs in the night:* he alone can give you a ſatisfactory ſolution of thoſe doubts and difficulties; and therefore if you ſincerely want it, apply to him for it: and try to come to him as the ſcripture directs, making mention of Chriſt's name. Say to him that you have heard that he has deviſed a method of glorifying all the perfections of his nature by ſhewing mercy to ſuch ſinners as you are, by pardoning and ſaving them through a Mediator: Cry to him that he would make you underſtand this wonderful method; and that he would ſhine in your heart to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jeſus Chriſt. Try immediately to truſt in this Saviour according to the knowledge you have of him, and that knowledge will increaſe.

II. THE *Temporizers.* They are always of that religious perſwaſion which is the moſt agreeable to their connections, which they have been educated in, or

which is fashionable in the age or country wherein they live. They are chiefly of three sorts.

1. The slothful or dissipated temporizers. Persons who, from the love of ease, are averse to all enquiries concerning religion; whose time is so much engrossed by business or amusements that they have none left for thinking deliberately of religious concerns; who find the duties of religion inconsistent with their favourite pursuits or their favourite pleasures; who instead of aiming at or desiring perfection in holiness, would have only so much of it as is absolutely necessary to evidence them to be in a state of grace; who, in their choice of a religious profession, are sure to fix on that which is likely to be the least attended with trouble or inconveniency; all these are temporizers from indolence and dissipation. Being *slothful*, they are not *followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

2. The covetous and and aspiring temporizers. Persons who are apprehensive that a strict adherence to the ways of religion would be utterly inconsistent with their views of rising in the world; who *make haste to be rich*, and find religion would be an obstacle in their way; who having formed a plan for making a fortune or for obtaining preferment, resolve to heed nothing that would divert them from the prosecution of it; who study to appear either lukewarm or zealous about the matters of God, as lukewarmness or zeal bids fairest to recommend them to the wealthy and the great; all these are temporizers from interested and ambitious views. Of this sort was Demas, who *forsook Paul, having loved the present world.*

3. The cowardly temporizers. Persons who would not, for a world, be reckoned either more or less religious than their neighbours; who are as much afraid of being accounted strict professors as of being accounted abandoned profligates; who have not the resolution to abide by a religious profession, unless the world countenance them in it; who dread the

wrath of man more than the wrath of God, and love the praiſe of man more than the praiſe of God; who inceſſantly frighten themſelves and others with terrible repreſentations of the loſſes and hardſhips they are likely to ſuffer in adhering to the cauſe of Chriſt and a good conſcience; who talk a great deal about prudence as the firſt of human virtues, by which they mean the art of keeping well with the world; and a great deal about moderation, by which they mean a diſpoſition to forbear being pointed or explicit in a religious profeſſion before its avowed enemies; in fine, who have ſome conviction of the truth, but ſuppreſs that conviction ſo far as to neglect endeavouring to glorify God by an open profeſſion of it: all theſe are *Temporizers* from that *fear of man which bringeth a ſnare.* Such was Nicodemus who came to our Saviour by night.

TIMOTHY had been a faſhionable Temporizer. He poſſeſſed many valuable talents; but it was chiefly his complaiſance and the art he had of accommodating himſelf to the humour of the great, which induced a man of quality to appoint him governour to his eldeſt ſon. Timothy had been a conſiderable time in that ſituation, when he was brought under deep impreſſions of his ſin and danger. His concern for *the great ſalvation* made him indifferent to his former worldly purſuits. The ſenſe he had of the *exceeding ſinfulneſs of ſin*, conſtrained him to reprove it, even when the reproof was contrary to the maxims of worldly prudence. The Spirit of God had ſhewn him the vanity of man's wiſdom as to matters of religion in ſo ſtrong a light, that now he could not bear human devices in the worſhip of God: On that account, he thought proper to withdraw from the church of England; and excuſed himſelf from attending his pupil, as uſual, on the Sabbath. In conſequence of ſuch a revolution in his ſentiments and conduct, he declined gradually in the favour of his patron; who at laſt, took an opportunity to tell him,

That as he intended to ſend his ſon to a boarding ſchool, he had no farther occaſion for his ſervice; but ſhould be happy to ſee him at his houſe as often as ———. A day or two after, Timothy met with Lyſander an old acquaintance: who having been acquainted with what had happened, accoſted him in this manner.

Lys. So, it ſeems, you have been turned out of your place for refuſing to conform to the church of England. It was a meer whim, Timothy. You might have been as good a Chriſtian among the Epiſcopalians as among the Preſbyterians. The prudent part of the world will call you a fool; and men of moderation and liberality of ſentiment, a fanatic.

Tim. I had withdrawn from the church of England for reaſons which I was convinced were clearly contained in the ſcriptures of truth: and I am ſtill under the ſame conviction. How then, conſiſtently with a due regard to the ſcriptures as the word of God, can I return to the communion of the church of England?

Lys. I hope, I eſteem the ſcriptures as much as any man: but I would not contend ſo much for circumſtantials as *for judgment, mercy and faith*, which our Saviour calls *the weightier matters of the law.*

Tim. The paſſage itſelf you refer to affords a convincing argument for a ſacred and inviolable regard to what you call *circumſtantials* as well as to the weightier matters: for our Lord adds, *Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* From which it appears, that our Lord did not find fault with the Phariſees for their exactneſs in obſerving the *ceremonial law*, but for the want of a due regard to God's authority in obſerving it; which they evidenced by their neglect of the moſt important duties of morality.

Why, Lyſander, did you turn off your ſteward Fungoſus? Was he diſhoneſt?

Lys. No.

TIM. Did he uſe his fellow-ſervants ill?

LYS. No.

TIM. Did he grow inattentive to his buſineſs?

LYS. No; but he would never follow my directions in any thing. It is true, the fellow was very ingenious, and executed his own plans dextrouſly; but I could never make him execute mine. Indeed he had ſuch a ſpirit of contradiction as no merit in other reſpects could render ſufferable.

TIM. Are we poor inſignificant mortals apt to be in ſuch anger with our inferiors, when they happen to croſs our inclination? And ſhall not the Lord of heaven and earth be much more diſpleaſed, if in any inſtance, we diſregard his will revealed to us in the ſcriptures? But we are guilty of ſuch diſregard whenever we pretend to worſhip him by other means than what he has appointed in his word. *In vain*, ſays our Lord, *do ye worſhip me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* Vain worſhip is a profanation of God's name: Vain worſhip brings the curſe inſtead of the bleſſing on its obſervers.

LYS. You know our Saviour himſelf was in communion with the eſtabliſhed church of the Jews, and uſed to join in their public worſhip. Perhaps the liturgy which the Jews then made uſe of was as exceptionable as the Engliſh liturgy. We are ſure the Jews were, at that time, exceedingly corrupt.

TIM. We have no account in the New Teſtament of any public liturgy among the Jews. As to the Talmud and other compoſitions of the Jewiſh Rabbins, however uſeful they may be for preſerving ſome of their national cuſtoms or opinions, little credit is otherwiſe due to them with reſpect to hiſtorical facts.

As our Lord ſet us a perfect example of every duty, ſo particularly of a faithful teſtimony againſt the evils of our times. With what wholeſome ſeverity did he expoſe the reigning vices of the Phariſees; their pride, their hypocriſy, their covetouſneſs and

extortion? He never neglected an opportunity of tendering suitable reproof: When he was at meat in the house of a Pharisee, he faithfully reproved his entertainer for his pride and self conceit, Luke vii. 36,——47. When he was in the family of Lazarus which had so distinguished a share of his affection, we find him dealing plainly with Martha as to the excess of her care and anxiety about the things of the world, Luke x. 41. When Peter, from a mistaken tenderness, expressed himself against the sufferings of his beloved Lord, he received this terrible rebuke, *Get thee behind me, Satan; thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men*†.

We are sure our Lord would never countenance in his practice those evils against which he cried so loudly in his doctrine. He was *holy, harmless, undefiled and separated from sinners.* He never practised any of their unwritten traditions: he and his followers openly distinguished themselves from all the sects into which the Jews were divided at that time. If we find him often in the synagogues or in the temple, it was because these were places of public concourse where he had an opportunity to preach the gospel to the people. Another reason for his attendance in the temple was, that he might perform such parts of Old Testament-service as were appropriated to that holy place.

Lys. Our Saviour instead of approving a secession from the scribes and Pharisees, exhorted the disciples to hear their instructions, Matth. xxiii. 3.

Tim. Our Lord could never be inconsistent with himself. But in Matth. xvi. he charges his disciples to *beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees.* In Matth.

† This is perhaps the severest reproof our Lord ever administred to any of his faithful followers. And whence was his severity on this occasion? Was it because his heart was so much set upon finishing the work that was necessary for the salvation of sinners that nothing was so offensive to him as the least opposition to it? An evidence of the greatness of Christ's love to poor sinners. A caveat against unbelief.

xv. he calls them *blind, leaders of the blind.* He says, they would not *suffer those that were entering into the kingdom of heaven, to go in.* They made their proselytes *twofold more the children of hell than themselves.* It seems plain, therefore, that our Lord considered them as false teachers whose *instructions caused to err from the words of knowledge.* This passage must therefore be so understood as to consist with a testimony against the corrupt doctrine as well as against the corrupt practices of the Scribes and Pharisees. But the people are here exhorted to observe and do whatsoever the Scribes and Pharisees enjoined as publishers and interpreters of the divine law, and, particularly, as members of the *Sanhedrin* or the council of seventy; who might well be said *to sit in Moses seat,* since according to God's immediate direction, they were originally ordained by Moses to share with him the burden of judging the causes of Israel. In this view, our Lord tells his hearers, that the instructions which the Scribes and Pharisees delivered agreeable to the word of God and to the original design of their office, should be carefully attended to, nor should offence be taken at any of them for the contrary practices of the Scribes and Pharisees.

LYS. You are too rigid: you must make allowances for the weakness and the variety of men's understandings and tempers.

TIM. In those instances where a person or a church has not, as yet, attained to the knowledge of the truth, or is only ignorant or misinformed, or is sincerely struggling against some evil not yet overcome; in such cases we ought to entertain sentiments of charity and forbearance: we are indeed to testify plainly and particularly against every real evil; but in the above mentioned cases, we are to encourage rather than condemn the church and the individual; we are to encourage them to proceed in reformation. On the other hand, when there appears much contempt of the truth, with the aggravation of apostacy

from it, and of obſtinacy and enmity againſt it, a ſharper manner of reproof becomes neceſſary; we muſt withſtand ſuch oppoſers to the face; we muſt withdraw ourſelves from them; ſuch *tongues* as thus *riſe up againſt Zion, ſhe muſt condemn.*

CHRISTIANS can tell, as matter of experience, that there is not any thing more uſually accompanied with the ſenſible hiding of the Lord's face and with his ſharp rebukes, than the wilful neglect of opportunities of reproving ſin, or of teſtifying againſt error: and no wonder; ſince it is ſo peculiarly nauſeous to Chriſt for church-members to be of ſuch a lukewarm temper, *neither cold nor hot*, as to be indifferent to the indignities that are done to him: it makes him threaten to *ſpue them out of his mouth.*

LYS. It ſeems to be the part of a wiſe man to comply with the humour of the times in ſome things, that he may procure attention to his inſtructions in other things of more importance. So did Socrates and Plato, and Pythagoras, who conformed to the eſtabliſhed worſhip of their country, though, it is probable, they were ſenſible of its abſurdities. Even the apoſtle Paul *became all things to all men.*

TIM. The falſe prudence or policy of the world may ſuggeſt, That we may do evil that good may come; That the end may ſanctify, or at leaſt excuſe unlawful means. But the bible, by which Chriſtians are to regulate their conduct, knows no ſuch maxims. Chriſtians are expreſly forbidden *to follow a multitude to do* any *evil.* It is at their peril if they deny Chriſt's name in any reſpect, or on any account.

THE repreſentation you have given of ſome celebrated philoſophers is little to their advantage. They were, it ſeems, poor cowardly wretches, who durſt not utter a ſyllable againſt what they knew to be a ſyſtem of the groſſeſt lies that were ever impoſed upon the credulity of mankind: for ſuch, if they had any knowledge of the true God, muſt have been

their views of the religion of their country. They were as cruel as cowardly; otherwise how could they have remained silent spectators of the delusions which they saw mankind under, with regard to points of so much consequence to their happiness as the being of God and the right manner of worshipping him. Sure, one honest man that endeavours to make an upright stand for truth in opposition to the tide of fashion and vulgar prejudice, deserves far better of society, than a thousand such pusillanimous philosophers.

A WITNESS of Christ, however, should guard against giving any unnecessary offence; he may study to be agreeable without being unfaithful: *Be courteous*, is a divine command, as well as *be stedfast in the faith.* We are to shew out of a good conversation our works *in meekness of wisdom.* There are certain prepossessions in favour of particular indifferent customs of a country; and certain innocent peculiarities of temper and demeanour, which it would be a morose peevishness rather than any necessary zeal for the truth to insist on people's relinquishing. It was in such respects as these, that Paul *became all things to all men;* but as to any point in which the cause of Christ or of his truth was really concerned, never man was more steady or more determined than was this apostle.

YES, Lysander, let us detest the character of him who deliberately *sells the truth;* who, at the call of interest or of worldly favour, tramples on conscience and the honour of God. On the other hand, let us contemplate as a pattern for our imitation, such a character as that of the seraph Abdiel in Milton:

Among the faithless, faithful only he:
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshaken, unseduc'd, unterrify'd,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single.

Let us follow them who have been *faithful unto death*. Let us follow Christ especially; whose ardent zeal for the house of God *did eat him up*; who *set his face like a flint* to accomplish our salvation in his *obedience unto death, even the death of the cross*. How hard are our heart that can resist the influence of such an example, and of *love that passeth knowledge*!

III. The *Selfish Devotees*. A person of this character pretends to be so much taken up with heart-religion that he has no leisure for attending to external or positive institutions. He thinks all questions about the outward order and government of the church quite needless. With him it is a matter of mere indifference what profession a person makes, provided his heart be right, which, in his opinion, is equally the case with devout Christians of all denominations.

Some of this character are very talkative about religion: others are against uttering a syllable on that subject; for, say they, when we shew our religious knowledge, we feed our vanity. But they all agree in despising what they call outward forms.

Among the causes or occasions of this devotional extravagance, we may reckon the following:

1. The offence that some have taken at the abuses of the outward forms of religion. When they saw men cover their schemes of ambition with the pretext of zeal for the external ordinances of religion, they were tempted to consider these ordinances as always connected with evil designs. Having seen them made subservient to the purposes of vice, they no longer thought they could be so to those of virtue and true piety.

2. The want of proper views of God's authority in those ordinances; and of the connection between the due observance of them and our partaking of spiritual blessings. No one that ever attained such views of those institutions, can altogether lose his e-

ſteem of them. But it is no wonder to ſee one diſregard them, who never ſought more in attending on them, than merely to amuſe himſelf with the external part or what is exhibited to the carnal eye. Beſides, in our day, when iniquity abounds, ordinances are little accompanied with viſible effects; a providential diſpenſation whereby men harden themſelves in the diſregard of them.

3. CONSIDERING the innate corruption of human nature, we cannot help aſcribing this ſtrange devotional contempt of God's ordinances, to pride. Perſons muſt have a very high notion of their attainments in religion, when they think they can do well enough without thoſe outward helps which are ſo neceſſary to other Chriſtians. To be ſure, they muſt be ſoaring (in their own conceit) to wonderful heights in the divine life, when they pretend to be devout in ſome other way than by uſing the ordinary means of God's appointment. Indeed, ſome of them have carried their extravagant pretenſions ſo high, that they have actually boaſted of being already perfect.

IF it be aſked, Where are theſe Devotees to be found? Perhaps among the Quakers, or the followers of Madam Guion?‡ We anſwer, not among them only. Are there not many called Preſbyterians, and other Proteſtants, who, in place of contending for the purity of the external inſtitutions of Chriſt, regard a teſtimony againſt the corruptions of them with the coldeſt indifference? Do they not defend that indifference by alledging that ſuch a teſtimony is of little importance to the religion of the heart? And yet is it not plain, that if theſe ordinances themſelves are of importance to practical godlineſs, a teſtimony on their behalf muſt be ſo too? Since on the one hand, it is only while we endeavour to obſerve the inſtitutions of Chriſt according to his word, that we can warrantably expect his bleſſing on them; and

‡ She gave riſe to Quietiſm in France. She preached up, ſays Voltaire, the tranquillity of the ſoul, the annihilation of all its faculties, and inward worſhip.

ſince, on the other hand, Satan and man's depraved nature are ever at work to corrupt thoſe inſtitutions; it is plain, that the due obſervance of them and our profiting by them, muſt be very cloſely connected with a teſtimony on their behalf. We heartily approve of the ſentiments which devout people of this deſcription expreſs with reſpect to the difficulty and importance of heart-religion: we only mean that they are guilty of inconſiſtency and of abuſe, when they ſet theſe ſentiments in oppoſition to the profeſſion of the truth, and an open adherence to the cauſe of Chriſt.

VERUS having been enlightened to diſcern the ſpiritual beauty of our Lord's inſtitutions, deſired to adhere cloſely even to ſuch of them as were the moſt generally neglected or deſpiſed. One day returning from a conſiderable journey which he had taken in order to have an opportunity of joining in public worſhip with ſome people who he underſtood were teſtifying againſt various corruptions of divine ordinances, he happened to meet with Simplicius. Simplicius had religion at heart: but he could not, he ſaid, enter into the views of his friend with reſpect to the importance of circumſtantials. I am afraid, continued he, you are too anxious about your teſtimony, your outward forms, and the purity of your profeſſion. Theſe things divert your attention, Verus, from the exerciſes of the heart.

VERUS. Does a merchant's exactneſs in executing the commiſſions of his correſpondents abroad, argue inattention to his buſineſs at home?

SIM. Quite the reverſe: for theſe correſpondents make him ſuch returns as enable him to deal to a far greater extent than ever before.

VER. In like manner, though a particular ordinance may not appear ſo cloſely connected with the caſe of our ſouls as ſome others; yet, Simplicius, if we obſerve that ordinance from a ſingle regard to the

divine authority, we shall find it more to our spiritual advantage than a great many selfish endeavours to better our case. Keeping the words of Christ is the way to have communion with him, John xiv. 23. *He that is liberal* in this respect, *shall be made fat*, Prov. xi. 25. If we would be *kept from the hour of temptation*, we should be careful to *keep the word of Christ's patience*, Rev. iii. 10. But what think you of a servant who cares not for obeying his master's commands, unless they be nearly connected with his own interest?

SIM. He may be said to serve himself rather than his master.

VER. How provoking, then, to the Lord of heaven and earth is that selfishness which leads us to dispute his commands, because they do not seem to contribute so much to our comfort or our interest as we could wish! A reverence of the divine authority should make us have respect to all God's commandments, *If I am a master, where is my fear, saith the Lord of hosts?*

SIM. Surely this is a chief command, *Keep the heart with all diligence.*

VER. True, Simplicius; and we should be careful to keep the heart by watching against a cold indifference to any of God's truths or institutions: for as we are affected toward these, he accounts us affected toward himself.

SIM. I have often observed, that persons who are very rigid adherents to what they call scripture-forms of worship and church-government, are very remarkable for pride and self-conceit.

VER. Consider, Simplicius, that various principles enter into the composition of every human character; and many different motives may occasion the same appearances of temper and behaviour. Hence when we lay the blame of what is wrong in a person's character or conduct upon any religious opinion which he seems to entertain, we should know, ei-

ther from the nature and tendency of the opinion itſelf, or from proper evidence of the fact, that it actually is the cauſe of that wrong: if we find it to be the cauſe, we are likewiſe to examine the degree in which it is ſo: and farther ſtill, whether the perſon has juſt views of it; or whether he does not pervert it.

But with reſpect to the character of thoſe who endeavour after an exact obſervance of the inſtitutions of Chriſt, allow me, Simplicius, to aſk you a queſtion. Suppoſe two perſons are the patients of the ſame phyſician: the one follows the phyſician's preſcription in every part of it as exactly as he can: the other obſerves only as much as he thinks eſſential. Say, now, which of the two diſtruſts himſelf, and confides in the honour and ability of the phyſician? Which of the two diſcovers the leaſt pride and ſelf-conceit?

Sim. He undoubtedly who endeavours to follow the whole of the preſcription. But your outward forms of religion are ſo much controverted, that—

Ver. It will not follow that they are either right or wrong, frivolous or important. That a propoſition has been the ſubject of much diſputation is merely an accidental circumſtance which argues neither its truth nor its falſehood, but only that men have had different apprehenſions concerning it. Should this be deemed a ſufficient reaſon for rejecting any thing in religion, we may reject the whole of it; and not only religion, but the firſt principles of reaſon and the teſtimony of our external ſenſes; all which have been controverted. It is, therefore, a mere vulgar prejudice againſt the inſtitutions of Chriſt, that they have been the ſubject of diſputation. It is unworthy a man of ſenſe to give over the ſearch of truth or of excellence, merely becauſe others have been unable to find it, or unwilling to acknowledge it. It is unworthy a man of candour to ſay that either perſons or things ſhould have no friends or adhe-

rents, only becauſe they happen to have many enemies.

SIM. Though theſe outward obſervances might be highly proper in the infant ſtate of the church, they ſeem now to be antiquated and of no more uſe. We who have the advantage of the new Teſtament, are to *worſhip God*, not with outward forms, but *in ſpirit and in truth.*

VER. The obſervances, indeed, of the old Teſtament that reſpected the coming of Chriſt *to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf* as a future event, are now no more neceſſary, when Chriſt the ſubſtance of them has actually appeared, and finiſhed the work that was given him to do. But of all the other ordinances that God hath appointed in his word, there is not one which we are not indiſpenſably bound to obſerve, or which will not continue obligatory on the church till the end of time. We are indeed to worſhip God *in ſpirit*, without thoſe carnal ordinances which were in uſe before the coming of Chriſt; *and in truth*, as having the ſubſtance and reality of the ancient figures clearly revealed to us; ſo that we may behold the glory of the Lord with open face, the veil of Moſaic inſtitutions being drawn aſide. But our freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, does not leſſen our obligation to glorify God in our *bodies* as well as in our *ſpirits* by a careful obſervance of the few poſitive inſtitutions which our Lord has left us. The authority of a lawgiver ſhould not be the leſs but the more regarded, that it is exerted with gentleneſs and moderation. It is remarkable that the Lord hath connected his bleſſing with the external obſervance of his ordinances much in the ſame manner in the new Teſtament as he had done in the old. He ſaid in the old Teſtament, *In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bleſs thee:* he ſays in the new, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midſt of them.*

SIM. If we have the inward ſentiments of true piety; if the love of God and univerſal goodwill to mankind reign in our hearts; we need be no more anxious about the form of our religion than about the cut of our cloaths.

VER. Rather ſay, If we have the true love of God ſhed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghoſt, we will not, for the whole world, give our deliberate conſent to the breach of one of God's commands, however trivial the matter of it, (like the eating of the fruit of a certain tree which was the matter of the firſt poſitive precept ever given to mankind) may appear to the eye of ſenſe and reaſon. If we have a true, heart-felt love of mankind, we muſt be in pain, whenever we ſee them incur the diſpleaſure of the Almighty, by perſiſting in the breach of even one of the leaſt of his commands; and eſpecially when we ſee them caſting off any of thoſe inſtitutions, with the obſervance of which he has been pleaſed to connect his bleſſing.

THE bible knows nothing of that heart-religion which does not manifeſt itſelf in ſuitable actions. It is vain for a perſon to pretend that he has the principle of faith, if he does not ſhew it by good works; that he loves his neighbour, if he neglect to relieve his neceſſities; that he believes with the heart unto righteouſneſs, if he is no way concerned to make confeſſion with the mouth unto ſalvation; that he loves Chriſt, if he is aſhamed to keep the word of his patience; or, in fine, that he is willing to *ſtand with the Lamb on mount Zion, having his Father's name*, both in the heart and in the hand, if he ſtill refuſes to have it, *written in his forehead*.

BEWARE, then, Simplicius, of eſtimating the duty of obeying a divine command by the judgment that carnal ſenſe and reaſon paſs upon the matter of it: if at any time, you are apt to loſe ſight of the importance of any ſcriptural duty, you need not, like the leprous nobleman of Aſſyria, when the pro-

phet bade him go wash in Jordan, perplex yourself with much reasoning about the matter of such a duty: you need not apply to this or the other subtile casuist: you have free access to the infinite Lawgiver himself; go to him as your God and Father in Christ, and cry, that he would shew you his authority, his majesty, sovereignty, wisdom, holiness, love and faithfulness in such a precept, according to his word, *the meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way.*

IV. THE *Waverers.* These profess to be enquiring after the truth, but they never find it. One may fitly address them in the words of Elijah to the people of Israel, *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.* Why are many at such a loss? Is it because the revelation which God hath given us is obscure and hard to be understood? By no means; for though there is enough in the scriptures to exercise the most elevated understanding, they are calculated in the best manner to instruct the meanest.—They have milk for babes, as well as meat for strong men. But the following are some of the causes or occasions of this wavering:

1. Men's conceit of their own wisdom. Wavering or doubting implies a consciousness of ignorance; how then does it spring from self-conceit? When persons come to the study of the scriptures, full of themselves, with all their prejudices strong about them, it may well be said of them that hearing they do not hear, and seeing they do not perceive, and reading they do not learn. It is only the humble and the simple-minded who attain to certainty and establishment in divine truth, according to the scripture, Matth. xi. 15. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes.* 1 Cor. iii. 18.

Let no man deceive himself: if any man seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise.

2. Duplicity. James i. 8. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.* The affections, leading different ways, never fail to bias the understanding; and we need not wonder if we are not certain of truths to which we have an aversion; or if we waver, where we have no inclination to be fixed.

3. Want of experience of the spiritual savour and sanctifying efficacy of divine truth. Such experience, while it produces a more permanent conviction than the clearest reasoning, engages the affections, and makes persons be rooted and grounded in the love of the truth. How directly opposite to the character of which we speak, was that of the saints recorded in scripture! to whose taste the word was *sweeter than the honey dropping from the comb, and who esteemed it more than their necessary food.* If at any time they were tempted to waver, they set themselves, through the mercy of God upholding them, to resist the temptation: and whenever they felt any disposition to slacken their resistance, or to fall in with the temptation, they said, *This is mine infirmity:* Nor would they allow themselves any rest, till in the way of going to God's sanctuary and in the diligent use of appointed means, they were, through God's blessing, delivered, and brought to a thorough establishment in the very truth about which they had been tempted to waver. See remarkable examples of this in the 73d and 77th psalms. Whence was it that they were so resolute in holding fast the truth? The reason was, they had experienced the saving, sanctifying power of it in their hearts; they received it as the word of God that wrought in them effectually. It is owing to the want of this experience that wavering or doubting of the truth abounds so much in our day.

4. The neglecting to view divine truths as connected with the perſon of Chriſt; that moſt important connection whence they derive all their ſaving efficacy. The whole of revelation is either concerning the wonderful conſtitution of the perſon of Chriſt, concerning the doing, ſuffering, and glory of his perſon, concerning the benefits to be enjoyed in union to his perſon, or in fine, concerning the duties by which we expreſs our regard to his perſon, Eph. iv. 20, 21. *But ye have not ſo learned Chriſt; if ſo be, that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus.*

5. A great many occurrences or incidents are laid hold of as pretences for wavering: ſuch as the diſputes about matters of religion, the eminent men and their plauſible reaſoning on both ſides of a queſtion, the adherents to oppoſite religious tenets being equally virtuous or equally immoral.

THE prevalence of this character in the reformed churches ſeems to be one principal cauſe of the preſent decline of religion in them, and indeed threatens their utter ruin. They not only ſhew no diſpoſition to make any farther advances in reformation, but have loſt all reſolution to hold faſt what they attained. Hence they allow in their communion ſuch as deny and are not aſhamed to ridicule the leading principles of the reformation.

EUSTATHIUS and Polyſephus were intimate friends. Their converſation often turned on religion. Euſtathius, though ready to acknowledge that his proficiency in the knowledge of divine truth was very little, conſidering the advantages he enjoyed, was firmly perſuaded of many doctrines which he had learned from the ſcriptures, and which he found the Holy Spirit made uſe of as the appointed means of our ſanctification. Polyſephus, on the contrary, having taken up many of his religious opinions from the converſation of the gay and the faſhionable part of the

world, was not convinced of the neceſſity of a well-grounded aſſurance in matters of religion, and with regard to the moſt part of them, looked upon it as of no conſequence what a perſon aſſented to, or what he denied.

EUSTATHIUS and Polyſephus happened one day to meet at the houſe of their common friend. They found that they had come from the ſame village but by different roads. Upon which Polyſephus took occaſion to obſerve, That people's different perſuaſions, if attended with a virtuous life, would iſſue alike in the heavenly happineſs.

EUS. Whatever you mean by a virtuous life, I am ſure there are opinions that tend to lead us away both from holineſs and from heaven. Errors are among thoſe evil thoughts which proceeding out of the heart, defile the man. The apoſtle lays it down as the conſequence of an error concerning the reſurrection of the dead, *That our faith would be vain, and we would be ſtill in our ſins.* If the truth make us free from ſin, then error muſt tend to bring or keep us under the power of it. Indeed, it is a principle of common ſenſe, that we cannot ſhew any due regard to a character which we take to be ſomething altogether different from what it really is. But what elſe is our obedience than the regard we ſhew to the God of ſalvation, as he is revealed in the ſcriptures of truth?

POL. I am often at a loſs when I conſider the fair pretences of the different parties which now divide the Chriſtian world.

EUS. From the very beginning there were wolves in ſheep's clothing that got into the flock of Chriſt, *not ſparing it.* Theſe occaſioned diviſions and offences even in the firſt ages of the Chriſtian church. Many of theſe diſcovered themſelves in broaching opinions which were a diſgrace as well to reaſon as to Chriſtianity: ſuch were the Gnoſtics and the Manichees. Afterward, when the rulers of the world

began to favour the Chriſtian church, the dominion of ſome aſpiring eccleſiaſtics grew by degrees to ſuch a pitch, that at length, it had all the marks and characters of the *man of ſin and ſon of perdition, who oppoſeth and exalteth himſelf above all that is called God, or that is worſhipped; ſo that he, as God, ſitteth in the temple of God, ſhewing himſelf that he is God.* The greater part of what was called the Chriſtian world ſubmitting themſelves to this dominion, the faithful few who endeavoured to adhere to the ſimplicity of the truth as it is in Jeſus, were obliged to ſeparate themſelves from the majority. The world, therefore, called them ſometimes Lollards, ſometimes Wickliffites, ſometimes Huſſites; for it always reckoned them odious and contemptible. At laſt, by the inſtrumentality of Luther and other preachers of the everlaſting goſpel, *the tenth part of the city fell*, and that glorious event, the reformation from Popery, was brought about. Then whole provinces and kingdoms took the name of Proteſtants, and flocked to the banner of Chriſt's teſtimony againſt Popery. But even in theſe proteſtant countries, the devil was at no loſs for inſtruments to corrupt or to oppoſe the church of God. Proteſtant princes were led to gratify their ambition at the church's expence. The reſtraints that thoſe princes put upon the conſciences of their ſubjects, and the liberty they took to mould the Proteſtant churches to their taſte and inclination, induced many of the faithful to maintain their Chriſtian freedom and the purity of goſpel-ordinances by teſtifying againſt the conſtitution of theſe churches, and, at laſt, by ſeparating from them. The princes, impatient of being thwarted in their ſchemes by theſe diſſenters, tried, at firſt, to ſuppreſs them by coercive methods; but finding the attempt utterly unſucceſsful, they diſcovered that they would gain their political ends much better by toleration. Thus providence, at laſt, having granted to diſſenters, from national eſtabliſhments, outward peace and proſperity, they became numerous, and in a great meaſure

fashionable; they were *of the world* as well as *in it*. Then the minds of men took a new turn: formerly they acquired reputation and made their fortunes by paying their court to kings and to their ministers, and by conforming to the established religion; but now they attain the same worldly objects by other means more adapted to a cultivated state of society: by forming systems of theology, by address, by eloquence, by their pretensions to superior sanctity and wisdom; and, in fine, by all the arts proper for procuring followers and making parties. But a dutiful regard to God's authority in his word is as plainly different from the levity, the vain curiosity and the affected singularity which prevail with sectarists, as from the mean complaisance, the implicit faith and blind obedience with which the dictates of popes and princes, in matters of religion, have been received. Those *who heap up to themselves teachers having itching ears*, and *those who receive the mark of the beast*, are both condemned by the scripture.

Pol. When I see a set of people distinguished by the purity and simplicity of their manners, I am apt to think their principles not so bad as their enemies represent them.

Eus. I wish to disapprove as much as any one of exaggerating the faults or errors of any set of men, as being a thing both uncharitable and unjust. But if you mean, that when we hear some sectarists applauded by all the world as exceedingly virtuous, we are merely on that account to conclude that their opinions, however unscriptural we have reason to think them, are innocent and unblameable: I am afraid your test for judging of religious principles will prove a very false one. In the first place, View them closer. What seems beautiful to the superficial eye, is often discovered by a severer scrutiny to be full of deformity. Enquire whether they have an impartial regard to the whole of God's law; to the first as well as to the second table of it: whether they be

men of prayer as well as men of honour: whether they are ſpiritually minded: whether they are not much deſpoſed to juſtify themſelves and to diſpiſe others: whether they do not make more mention of their own righteouſneſs than of Chriſt's: and whether they do not pay more attention to the devices of men than to the ordinances of God: Sins in theſe and the like reſpects, however much the world may make light of them, are peculiarly heinous in the ſight of God. Indeed *what is highly eſteemed among men is abomination to the Lord.* And then ſuppoſing there are many things in their outward deportment amiable or praiſe-worthy, ſhould not theſe things be rather aſcribed to the principle of honour, to the natural dictates of conſcience, to ſome valuable truths which they ſtill retain, than to their falſe and dangerous opinions.

POLY. But does not our Lord lay it down as the rule whereby we may know falſe teachers, *By their fruits ye ſhall know them?*

EUST. Yes, Polyſephus; but then you muſt underſtand by theſe fruits whatever is contrary to *the power of godlineſs.* Though a doctrine may not *ſenſibly* lead us to ſuch irregularities of outward conduct as may expoſe us to the cenſure of the world; yet if it has a native tendency to increaſe our unbelief of God's word, or to leſſen our regard to him as our God and Redeemer; to make us leſs grieved for ſin, or leſs ſpiritually minded; we may be ſure that that doctrine is not from God. Our Lord having *cautioned* his diſciples againſt thoſe falſe teachers who, though inwardly *ravening wolves*, would come to them *in ſheep's clothing;* adds, *Ye ſhall know them by their fruits:* that is, they will diſcover themſelves to ſpiritual diſcerners (who can well diſtinguiſh the voice of Chriſt from that of ſtrangers) by their proper fruits; by their *inſtructions that cauſe to err from the words of knowledge;* by their influence and example tending to corrupt the church, and to divide her mem-

bers from the teſtimony of Chriſt, and from one another in him; and in fine, by their words and actions being habitually contrary to the law and the teſtimony. We are not, however, to conclude that theſe falſe teachers will always be reputed immoral in their lives: On the contrary, their coming *in ſheep's clothing* intimates that the ſmoothneſs of their external behaviour would procure them a fair and unblemiſhed reputation. The truth is, the whole of God's law is evidently deſigned to promote the happineſs of men: and though they are ſo much blinded by the corruption of nature as not to ſee this tendency in many parts of the law, in thoſe eſpecially which are more ſpiritual and refined; yet there are other parts of it in which this tendency is ſo viſible and ſtriking that ſelf love leads them to ſtudy ſome outward comformity to ſuch parts in their own conduct, and to commend it in the conduct of others. Now, falſe teachers may carry their morality thus far (which is all that is neceſſary to gain the applauſe of the world) conſiſtently enough with their endeavours againſt the purity of the truths and ordinances of Chriſt. Hence we hear ſo many encomiums on the Quakers, the Glaſſites and other daring blaſphemers of the inſtitutions of Chriſt in our day.

POLY. You ſhould not give people uncharitable names. When perſons become poſitive as to the truth of their religious opinions, they paſs the harſheſt cenſures on ſuch as cannot ſee things in the ſame light. In my mind, uncertainty with moderation is better than ſuch ungoverned zeal.

EUST. Uncharitableneſs, I think, may be defined, the hatred of our neighbour, or at leaſt, the want of due love to him, manifeſted in a diſpoſition to condemn him without ſufficient evidence of guilt, or to put a bad conſtruction on what may admit of a good one. But it is no hatred of our brother, but an inſtance of real friendſhip, to inform him of any thing that is wrong in his principles or practice, lay-

ing open its sinful nature and pernicious consequences in order to make him relinquish it. It would, no doubt, be uncharitable to charge one with erroneous opinions without sufficient evidence, from his own confession or otherwise, of his holding them. But if the opinions that one proclaims and glories in, are plainly unscriptural, it is our duty, it is true charity to reprove him and warn others by declaring such opinions to be, what they really are, unscriptural.

POLY. But it may be, he is in the right, and your own opinions, not his, are unscriptural.

EUST. Then I am chargeable with rashness and mistake. But I speak of the connection between a certain knowledge of our brother's error and the duty of testifying against it. In which case, our testimony and admonition may, through the Lord's blessing, *turn one from the error of his way and save his soul from death.*

IT would be very absurd for one who had neglected to give his friend good counsel in a case where it was plainly necessary, to justify the neglect by the general principle, that there is a possibility of mistaking the nature and consequences of human actions. It is equally unreasonable to neglect declaring the truth, or warning others against error for this general reason, that we may be wrong in our views of both. Indeed, if this reasoning, *that because men may be and frequently are mistaken, we must not suppose ourselves to be certain of any thing in particular, nor act as if we were so,* be once admitted; then our acquaintance with history and even our knowledge of the common affairs of life, whether acquired by our own experience or by the testimony of others, will be of little or no use.

POLY. But does not too much confidence of the truth of our opinions hinder us from an impartial examination of them. A little scepticism seems more favourable to free inquiry.

EUST. Yes, Polyſephus; there is a rational ſcepticiſm which is highly commendable: for never will we be ſenſible where evidence is, unleſs we be ſenſible where it is not. If we doubt of a propoſition, we ſhould have a reaſon for doubting of it. That reaſon being entirely removed, we cannot rationally doubt any longer: we are certain of it. That certainty, being ſincere, not pretended; being real, not imaginary, inſtead of being ſhaken by the freeſt enquiry, is more firmly eſtabliſhed.

WITH reſpect to opinions in general, certainty is the end we aim at in our enquiries concerning them. But ſurely it is unreaſonable to ſuppoſe that a partial attainment of our end will diſcourage us from uſing the means. Succeſs will rather animate our endeavours. It is well known, that there is nothing in mathematical ſcience that ſo much engages perſons to proſecute it, as the certainty with which it is attended.

CHRISTIANS, indeed, are often anxious to avoid the hearing of falſe teachers or the reading of erroneous books; but this does not proceed from an unwillingneſs to have their principles thoroughly examined: theſe they know will abide the ſevereſt ſcrutiny: But knowing they have a depraved nature ſuſceptible of bad impreſſions, they are juſtly afraid of having the affections alienated from the truth; the affections which would bias the underſtanding, and hinder it from diſcerning the evidence of divine truth. The evidence of divine truth, they know, cannot be overturned, but then they may loſe ſight of it. Thus a mathematician's fear that he may forget the demonſtration of a propoſition in Euclid, is very different from a fear that the demonſtration itſelf may prove a ſophiſm.

POLY. Enthuſiaſts pretend a great deal of certainty with regard to what all but themſelves ſee to be extravagant fancies.

EUST. In my mind, it is for want of that ſatisfac-

tion which the certainty of divine truth affords, that perſons are led to take up with vain imaginations, and become Enthuſiaſts. Hence a ſolid and full perſuaſion of the truth as it is in Jeſus is the only never-failing preſervative againſt enthuſiaſm.

IF a propoſition is evidently founded on ſome plain text, and is agreeable to the general tenor of ſcripture; if its tendency is the ſame with that of the gracious revelation which God hath given us, to give all glory to God, and to exclude the boaſting of the creature; the truth of ſuch a propoſition, where the authority of the ſcripture is duly regarded, cannot reaſonably be called in queſtion. But whatever uſe an Enthuſiaſt ſeems to make of the letter and ſometimes of the doctrine of ſcripture, his aſſent to any propoſition is chiefly influenced by ſome favourite but ungrounded imagination, to which he thinks it agreeable; by the ſtrong impreſſions that it makes upon him; by the hopes and the joys which it inſpires. An Enthuſiaſt cannot bring himſelf to examine impartially the opinions on which his hopes and joys are founded, for this plain reaſon; that it is for the ſake of his hopes and joys that he entertains thoſe opinions*. On the contrary, the Chriſtian is anxious to know whether his opinions be according to the ſcriptures, becauſe it is on account of their agreeableneſs to the ſcriptures that he holds them. Beſides the Enthuſiaſt is wholly intent upon ſome particular part of religion to the neglect of other parts†: and what he thus doats on is moſt commonly ſome imagination or invention of his own: But the Chriſtian's believing adherence to any truth or duty of God's word, inſtead of leading him, like the Euthuſiaſt's fond attachment, to neglect other truths

* When the heathen philoſopher ſaid, "That if the belief of "of the ſouls immortality was a deluſion, it was ſo agreeable a one "that he wiſhed to continue in it;" he ſpoke like an Euthuſiaſt.

† This is a remarkable trait in the character of an Enthuſiaſt: If he is much in devotional exerciſes, he makes little account of the duty that he owes to his neighbour. He talks much of his tranſporting joy, while he diſcovers little concern for the body of ſin.

or duties, never fails to increase his uniform and universal regard for them.

POLY. If I prosecute my enquiries, I am afraid I shall be continually changing my religious persuasion: on the other hand, it is dangerous to continue in an error.

EUST. Go on, by all means, Polysephus, in your enquiries. As you advance, the truths you already know will be known more perfectly: every step you take will throw new light upon them: every difficulty or objection, when removed, will strengthen your conviction. Every prejudice and every error you get rid of, will contribute to your establishment in the truth. Only let your enquiries be directed by the scripture, influenced by the love of the truth as it is in Jesus, and accompanied with earnest prayers to God, saying, *What I know not teach thou me.* Distrusting yourself, look up to God for the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. Yes, Polysephus push your enquiries as far as the means and opportunities afforded by Providence permit you. Shake off the restraints of custom, of authority whether ancient or modern. Pay no regard to names or parties. Receive the truth wherever you can find it. As in practice Christians ought to fear nothing but sin; so in matters of faith they should fear nothing but error.

POLY. The reasoning of one party seems very plausible, till another party comes and exposes the vanity of it.

EUST. What conclusion do you draw from that? That a pearl is no better than a glass toy, or a piece of pure gold than a counterfeit? I have read a story of two Knights who met at a pillar which had the same inscription on two sides: "Sure," said the one Knight as he read it on the side next him, "he "must have been a gallant hero, and defender of in- "nocence who is the subject of this golden inscrip- "tion." "No doubt," said the other, reading it

on the oppoſite ſide; "but I beg leave to correct a "miſtake; the inſcription is in ſilver." They maintained their ſeveral aſſertions with inflexible perſeverance, till each of them thought himſelf bound by all the laws of honour and of knighthood, to lift his arms againſt ſo unreaſonable an opponent. They were preparing for the combat, when an honeſt traveller happening to come up, enquired the cauſe. Both parties being heard, the traveller deſired them only to obſerve that on the one ſide of the pillar the inſcription was in gold; on the other it was in ſilver. Thus partial views may occaſion many controverſies; in which caſe perſons may be blameable for inattention, for ſloth and negligence, for raſhneſs in aſſerting more than they know, and in ſuppoſing they are acquainted with the whole of the ſubject, while they are acquainted only with a part. But how much more blameable or rather criminal is the artful Sophiſter who is reſolved to try all methods fair and unfair to maintain ſome preconceived opinion or the peculiarities of his party. In the firſt place, he ſtates the queſtion in ſo ambiguous a manner that the reader or hearer is apt to confound it with ſomething quite diſtinct from it. In the next place, he tries to connect his darling tenet with ſome popular topic on which he expatiates a great deal, in order both to catch the attention of the public, and to prevent the weakneſs of his arguments from being obſerved. Then he addreſſes the paſſions and prejudices of his readers or hearers, which he knows are much more attended to by the bulk of mankind, than candid reaſoning. If any difficulty occur, he neglects it, miſrepreſents it, or treats it with contempt. If he is writing or ſpeaking againſt any particular opponent, he never ſcruples to pervert his words to a meaning the fartheſt imaginable from what was plainly intended. He neglects that part of his opponent's reaſoning on which he knows the greateſt ſtreſs is laid; and imputes to him conſequences which are drawn, not from his declared principles, but from an invi-

dious conſtruction of them, or from unguarded and unconnected expreſſions. Theſe, not to mention many groſſer methods, ſuch as lies, calumny and detraction, are to be held in abhorrence by every honeſt man, as well as by every ſincere enquirer after truth.

THE ſincere and modeſt enquirer after truth! Where is he to be found, who is in love with truth for its own ſake; eſpecially with divine truth for the ſake of its infinitely glorious Revealer: who labours to ſeparate from the ſubject of his enquiry whatever does not belong to it, that his conceptions of it may be clear and diſtinct: who wants to mark preciſely where knowledge and certainty end, where ignorance and conjecture begin: who is willing to receive inſtruction from every quarter, from the learned and the unlearned, from friends and foes: who rejoices whenever truth is victorious, though he ſhould himſelf be vanquiſhed: who is critical, but too enlarged and elevated in his views to be nice; modeſt without timidity, and bold without inſolence?

IN fine, Polyſephus, the maxims of politicians may be diſcovered to be falſe, and the theories of philoſophers to be chimerical; but the truths of the Bible and the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity will only become more illuſtrious for every attempt againſt them; and they ſhall continue to ſhine with increaſing ſplendor, till he who is the truth, ſhall himſelf appear to the everlaſting confuſion of all his enemies.

POLY. I have a great averſion to the character of your *witneſſes*. They are generally fierce bigots: moroſe and gloomy in their manner of living, they affect to abhor every gaiety and every polite amuſement. At the ſame time, they are often deficient in that purity of morals, which alone can compenſate for their ſour and unſociable humour.

EUST. What is this hateful thing you call a Bigot? Is it one who is poſitive in his opinion without reaſon? Then a witneſs for the truth as it is in Jeſus

is no bigot: becauſe he has the weightieſt of all reaſons for what he adheres to, even the authority of God's word. Is it one who contends for trifles, as if they were matters of the utmoſt importance? Then the faithful witneſs for the truths of Chriſt is no bigot: becauſe we never can prize thoſe truths too much; we are to buy them and not to ſell them. Compared to them, all thoſe tranſitory advantages for which politicians debate and armies engage, are but the toys of children. Is it one who is exceſſively zealous for ſome favourite point which he reckons truth, while he diſregards other things of equal or greater conſequence? Then the witneſs of Chriſt is no bigot; for he has an univerſal regard to the doctrines and the commands of Chriſt: the authority of Chriſt engages him to eſteem them all. Is it one diſpoſed to propagate his religious tenets by fire and ſword? Then the witneſs of Chriſt is no bigot: Knowing that *the wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God*, he endeavours to *ſhew out of a good converſation, his works in meekneſs of wiſdom.* His chief aim is to be like the Lord Jeſus who is *meek and lowly in heart. The weapons of his warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of ſtrong holds.* If he is called to an account for his religious principles, *he is ready to give a reaſon of the hope that is in him with meekneſs and fear.* Is it one who hates any farther diſcoveries of the truth, and deſpiſes the means of better information? Then the witneſs of Chriſt is by no means a bigot: He is one who loves the light: he wants to learn more and more of him who is the great Revealer of ſecrets. He deſires, like Mary, to ſit at his feet and hear his words. Inſtead of being proud of his wiſdom, he acknowledges himſelf a fool, and comes to Chriſt that he may be made truly wiſe.

WITH reſpect to what you ſay about moroſeneſs, it is far from belonging to the character of a witneſs of Chriſt as it is delineated in the Bible; which is

the only view in which we plead for that character. It is a maxim with such a one, that *a merry heart doth good like a medicine.* He knows that *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* He has a conscientious regard to the precept, *rejoice evermore.*

It is true, that, though they have a relish for the enjoyments of life, they are careful about two things: In the first place that they be lawful; that they be neither sinful in themselves, nor incentives to any thing sinful. Hence they abstain from many fashionable amusements; such as, games of chance, theatrical entertainments, promiscuous dancings, and the like. Whoever has read the apologies of the primitive Christians, must know that their testimony against these things was much the same with that of the witnesses of Christ at this day†.

In the next place, They do not place their happiness in outward enjoyments or possessions. *The Lord is their refuge and portion in the land of the living.* Hence it ill becomes them to be elated with worldly prosperity, or much cast down with worldly losses and disappointments. But what though they have no taste for the jovial madness and riotous excess of the sons of dissipation? They endeavour after evenness of temper, solid peace of mind, and the possession of themselves, in the only way in which these blessings can ever be obtained; in the only way that

† The reproaches that are now cast upon the witnesses of Christ, are much the same that the Heathens used to throw out against the primitive Christians. Vos vero, says Cæcilius pleading the cause of heathenism in the Octavius of Minutius Felix, suspensi atque solliciti, honestis voluptatibus abstinetis; non spectacula visitis, non pompis intereftis; convivia publica absque vobis; ——pallidi, trepidi estis.

The same elegant author, vindicating the Christians on this head, represents the public shows of his time in a manner that will apply very well to those of our own. Nos igitur qui moribus et pudore censemur, merito malis voluptatibus et pompis vestris et spectaculis adstinemus, quorum ——noxia blandimenta damnamus. Nunc enim mimus vel exponit adulteria, vel monstrat: nunc enervis histrio amorem, dum fingit, infligit. Idem simulatis doloribus, lacrymas vestras vanis gestibus et nutibus provocat.

God hath appointed; that is, by a believing improvement of Christ for all the purposes of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption; by rejoicing in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh.

ON the one hand, our Lord Christ regards the world as his enemy in its prevailing customs, its favourite pleasures and pursuits; and therefore says to his followers, *Be ye not conformed to the world.* On the other hand, the men of the world, full of enmity against him, avoid the acquaintance of his professed followers; and are prone to condemn, without knowing them. It is true, though the view they have taken of them has been distant and superficial, yet they have observed two things with regard to them: *one* is their professed relation to Christ: *the other* is, the contrariety of their taste, of their sentiments and of the general tenor of their conduct, to their own. These two things are enough to make the world hate them.

As to what is really immoral in the conversation of some professed witnesses for the truth, I have no apology to offer: it must be acknowledged and lamented with shame and confusion of face. One thing however is obvious, that it is wrong to draw a conclusion from such particular instances against the character in general of witnesses for Christ; since those instances are plainly deviations from this character; and since it is unjust to impute the faults of some individuals to the whole body with which they stand connected. Though the offences of those professing a strict adherence to the truths of Christ are numerous and heinous and deeply aggravated; as depraved nature is the same in them as in others; as the devil and the world, from the mortal hatred they bear them, are sure to reserve for them, the most violent assaults or the most refined and subtle methods of temptation; and as their irregularities contrasted with the spotless purity of their evangelical profession, appear greatly the more glaring and e-

normous: yet after all, we have reaſon to think the charges that the world brings againſt them would be conſiderably diminiſhed, were we to deduct whatever has been added to their real offences by calumny and ſlander; whatever, in the caſe of others, men would aſcribe to the unavoidable weakneſs of human nature; whatever exaggerating repreſentations ſome have given of particular faults in order to bring down to their level a character which, their conſcience teſtifies, is, in general, far ſuperior to their own.

THE truth is, all the evil with which the men of the world reproach the witneſſes of Jeſus, is little to what they ſee in themſelves. They know the plague of their own heart: they readily acknowledge themſelves the chief of ſinners. Were you to compliment them on their piety and virtue, they would reject the fulſome flattery: "We are only poor ſinners," would they ſay; "and as no *outcaſts ready to periſh* "were ever in greater need of ſalvation, we ſeek it "through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: and our quar-"rel with the world is this, that they neglect the "great ſalvation, and refuſe to give God the glory "of it."—Whence is the ſorrow which the world ignorantly calls melancholy and moroſeneſs? Why are they ſo oft in the houſe of mourning, and walk ſoftly all their years in the bitterneſs of their ſoul? Why is there a mixture of ſadneſs in all their mirth? And why riſes the ſigh from the bottom of their heart even in the moments of tranſporting joy? The true reaſon is, they groan under the burden of a depraved nature: its deceitful workings and deplorable effects are matter of hourly lamentation.

POLY. Uncertainty as to religious opinions ſeems to do little harm.

EUST. It is diſhonourable to God: it reflects upon that revelation which he hath given us, as if it were ſo obſcure and doubtful as to be unfit to anſwer its end. Nay, if we do not believe God's record, that is, if we are not certain of it, the apoſ-

tle John assures us, we *make the God* of truth *a liar*. We can have no experience of the sweetness or saving efficacy of divine truth, unless we are assured of it. While you willingly or indolently harbour any uncertainty of divine truth, you are apt to give it up altogether: you are an easy prey to every seducer. You must stand upon sure ground, if you would not be drawn away with the error of the wicked.

THERE seems to be no religious duty or spiritual exercise but what is hindered by wavering. One who allows himself in it, cannot read or hear the word with profit, because he does not mix it with faith; that is, with a full persuasion of the truth, Heb. iv. 2. He cannot pray, acceptably, for we are to *ask in faith nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed*, James i. 6. He cannot receive the sacraments aright; because the very end of them is to confirm our faith, and deliver us from wavering. Finally, if we would hold fast our profession, we must study to get free from wavering, Heb. x. 23.

POLY. I am discouraged by the levity of my temper which dispose me much to wavering, and by the difficulties which must be surmounted before one come at the certain knowledge of divine truths.

EUST. You should, therefore, despair of attaining ing the saving knowledge of divine truth by your own endeavours meerly. Come to Christ who is *the great prophet whom the Lord our God hath raised up unto us*. Look to him for all that effectual teaching which is imported in such promises as these: *They shall be all taught of God; They shall all know me from the least even to the greatest; I will teach thee to profit.* Trust in him as the Wonderful Counsellor for the accomplishment of these promises, and you shall not be disappointed nor ashamed.

BE not offended at the manner of Christ's school. The first lesson you have to learn is very humbling

and mortifying to proud nature; it is concerning your own ignorance and unworthineſs. And then he teaches much by experience: he may probably bring you through fire and water in order to teach you ſome important leſſon thoroughly. As he led the Iſraelites forty years in the wilderneſs and humbled them, that they might know what was in their heart, and might learn that *man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word proceeding out of the mouth of the Lord*, Deut. viii. 2, 3. Be not diſcouraged, however; the more you know of our Lord's way of teaching, you will ſee the more of his wiſdom, his kindneſs and condeſcenſion in it. They are but ſtrangers to him, who think him an auſtere or hard maſter.

Be much in prayer. *If any man lack wiſdom, let him aſk it of God who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth none; and it ſhall be given him.* Aſk the Spirit, Luke xi. 13. He is our guide into divine truth. Look to the Lord that he may eſtabliſh and keep you. It is grace that eſtabliſhes the heart, Heb. xiii.

V. The ſincere but deſponding Chriſtian. Perſons of this character love Chriſt, and have communion with him in his ordinances. Hence the good of the church which is his body, is the chief object of their concern. But on taking a ſurvey of the preſent ſtate of religion, they are apt to indulge themſelves in ſuch a plaintive ſtrain as the following.

"Alas," ſays one of them, "the work of Chriſt "in my ſoul ſeems to make no progreſs. I am very "much under the feet of my enemies. The Lord "is diſhonoured: I have little or no ſtrength for "ſpiritual exerciſes, for the mortification of ſin, or "for walking in newneſs of life. It is long ſince I "had any comfortable experience of the Lord lift-"ing up the light of his countenance upon me; and "now I am apt to call in queſtion the reality of for-"mer experiences. Still I deſire to wait on him in

" his ordinances; but I generally find he has *with-*
" *drawn himself.* Such being my own case, I need
" the Jews wonder at the mournful things in the pub-
" lic state of religion. Yet I must lament these things,
" I dare not, I cannot seek or expect my own deli-
" verance, but in the way of seeking and expecting
" the deliverance of the church of God. The great
" things that God wrought for his church in Britain
" and Ireland are not only forgotten but burried; and
" all the grave stones which the force of human laws,
" the arts of sophistry, or the malevolence of slan-
" der could roll, are accumulated upon the Lord's
" work. We have turned what was the glory of
" these lands, their covenant-relation to the Lord,
" into shame. Our civil constitution as it compre-
" hends the ecclesiastical supremacy, and is blended
" with the establishment of Prelacy, the ruling prin-
" ciples and manners of the times, say, there is no
" such relation. And yet while this relation is deni-
" ed, and we persist in a course of open, heaven-da-
" ing perjury, we cannot reasonably look for a refor-
" mation. Surely the first step toward our returning
" to the Lord with the whole heart, will be a full
" and free acknowledgment of our treachery. But
" before we can be brought to that, there must be
" such a revolution in the sentiments and opinions,
" in the public and private conduct of all ranks in
" these lands, as we can hardly expect in the ordi-
" nary course of Providence. Besides, men are form-
" ing to themselves new schemes of religion with e-
" ven fair and plausible pretences of reformation, in
" avowed contempt of that which we are bound to
" by our solemn covenants. And they seem to pro-
" sper in their way; while many serious Christians
" are drawn over to their side. Our Lord does not
" now plead his cause by giving such remarkable
" checks to the opposers of his work, or such remark-
" able countenance to the professed friends of it,
" as he was wont to do in former times. Alas!

" theſe profeſſed friends are grown too much like " the church of Laodicea, lukewarm, neither cold " nor hot; and therefore our Lord threatens to ſpue " them out of his mouth. Nay, he ſeems to have " begun the execution of his threatening in the aw- " ful ſpiritual judgments that abound among us. " There is a great reſtraint of the Holy Spirit; and " we are under a great prevalence of Atheiſm, un- " belief, carnality and ſinful conformity to the world. " The glory is departed from our Iſrael."

THIS, to be ſure, is a moſt deplorable caſe; and he muſt have a heart void of ſenſibility to all that regards the glory of God or the welfare of his church, who is not affected with it. But ſtill an unbelieving deſpondency is quite unjuſtifiable. We are indiſpenſibly bound *to judge him faithful who hath promiſed*, even when providence wears the gloomieſt aſpect, and appears the moſt to contradict the promiſe. Like Abraham, *againſt hope* we are to believe *in hope*. We muſt endeavour to do ſo as ever we would not wiſh to be chargeable with the crime of *making* the *God* of truth *a liar*. It was the approved exerciſe of all the ſaints recorded in ſcripture, particularly of that illuſtrious group of them in the eleventh of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, to truſt the divine word in oppoſition to all appearances. Two things are always at the bottom of this deſponding frame of Spirit.

THE firſt is, a diſpoſition to think of the church, as if it were to be ſupported and advanced by the ſame worldly means that are uſed to ſupport and advance a civil ſociety, and that without thoſe external ſupports, it muſt be ruined. On the contrary, we are to conſider the church as a building the carrying on of which is in Chriſt's hands; for he *ſhall build the temple of the Lord, and ſhall bear the glory:* We are to conſider it as the fruit of the travail of his ſoul; the production and gathering of which cannot poſſibly fail, being altogether the work of the wiſdom, power, mercy and faithfulneſs of God: We are to

conſider it as the body of Chriſt, which by his infinite care and love, is in as perfect ſafety (ſo faith beholds it) amidſt all his enemies on earth, as the humanity of his wonderful perſon, far, far as it is beyond their reach in heaven.

THE other thing is raſhneſs in determining, that the Lord is not at all accompliſhing his promiſe, becauſe he is not doing ſo to our carnal apprehenſions and limited views. Jacob was in this unbelieving haſte when he ſaid, *All theſe things are againſt me.* What political ſagacity could have diſcerned the advancement of Joſeph in his ſtate of ſlavery and impriſonment? Who would have thought that God was accompliſhing the moſt glorious of all his works in humiliation and ſufferings of Chriſt, in the reproaches, the temptations, the mocking, ſcourging, buffeting, crowning with thorns, the wrath of God, and the curſed death which he endured?

As theſe deſponding apprehenſions have a tendency to relax our endeavours for the advancement of Chriſt's kingdom; ſo they are too often uſed as a pretext or excuſe for the neglect of ſuch endeavours. The language of ſpiritual ſloth is like that of one who came to the ruler of the ſynagogue from his houſe; *Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Maſter.*

IT is indeed our duty to mourn for the grounds of the Lord's controverſy with us. But unbelieving deſpondency unfits us for the exerciſe; ſince it hardens the heart by leading us to entertain diſhonourable ſuſpicions of God as if he would not, or could not accompliſh his promiſe. Unbelieving deſpondency is only grieved for the Lord's righteous procedure againſt a ſinning people; but goſpel-humiliation is a kindly ſorrow of heart for the ſin and rebellion which have been the cauſe of ſuch awful procedure. Unbelieving deſpondency leads us to murmur at the ways of God, and to excuſe our own conduct; on the contrary, true humiliation of ſoul leads us to

juſtify God and condemn ourſelves. This deſpondency, therefore, however it may put on the maſk of humility, is, at bottom, the moſt intolerable pride and rebellion.

So much with regard to the ſpirit of deſpondency in general; we may now conſider ſome of the particulars complained of.

In reply to all theſe particulars we may obſerve, that it is the Lord's uſual way to ſuffer his work both in perſons and in churches, to be brought very low, even to the very brink of utter deſtruction, at leaſt in their apprehenſion, that his revival of it may be the more conſpicuous; that he may appear in his glory. Another reaſon why he ſuffers it to be ſo, is, that his people, deprived of all carnal means and of every ſenſible ſupport, may be ſhut up to a ſingle dependence on the God of their ſalvation, on that unſeen hand which hath wrought ſuch wonders, and is ever working for the church's deliverance. In the promiſe, the tribulation of the church is infallibly connected with her deliverance; and the apparent extreme of the former with the moſt glorious inſtances of the latter; a connection which believed and duly improved, would give us *meat out of the eater, and ſweetneſs out of the ſtrong.*

We need not wonder that very fair and plauſible ſchemes are formed in oppoſition to the teſtimony of Chriſt; and ſome of the Lord's people themſelves are led away by them, as the apoſtle Peter was oftener than once, to oppoſe the work of God. Many and various are the devices of Satan: He leads the men of the world to an open and direct oppoſition to the cauſe of Chriſt; but he has more refined methods of drawing even the godly to oppoſe it in ſome reſpect or another. The Lord himſelf permits it to be ſo, that the church may ſee the neceſſity of having a ſingle regard to the law and the teſtimony; to ſhew her members that they are not to call any man maſter in the matters of God, however great his uſe-

fulneſs or his attainments in godlineſs; to incite Chriſtians to more diligence in ſtudying the teſtimony of Chriſt; for as many of the properties of gold are diſcovered by comparing it with ſuch metals as are likeſt it in appearance; ſo we may attain a more accurate knowledge of the cauſe of Chriſt or the word of his patience by comparing it with the ſchemes of religion which bear the neareſt reſemblance to it. In fine, the Lord permits it to be ſo in order to ſhew Chriſtians what hazard they run, while in this world, of being corrupted both in principle and practice. The moſt eminent ſaint may ſoon be led aſtray, if he grow careleſs and unwatchful.

WE have great cauſe to lament the abounding of ſpiritual judgments: theſe are far more unequivocal evidences of God's wrath againſt a people than any outward calamities. Few, indeed, have any ſight or ſenſe of them; but they are only ſo much the more fatal. Well may we wiſh, with the prophet, that *our head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears*, to mourn the ſore ſpiritual judgments that lie upon this generation. Only in ſuch exerciſe, we ſhould guard againſt two errors. One is charging God fooliſhly, as if he were to be blamed for theſe judgments: the procuring cauſe of all the hiding of his face, of our unprofitable attendance on ordinances, of our hearts being hardened from his fear, and of our being left to err from his way, is wholly with ourſelves, not with God: For he ſays to us, *The Lord is with you, while ye are with him; and if ye ſeek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forſake him, he will forſake you.* We have ourſelves only to blame for the reſtraint of the Holy Spirit, Micah ii. 7. *O thou that art named the houſe of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord ſtraitened? Are theſe his doings? Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?* The other error which we ſhould ſtudy to avoid, is, unthankfulneſs for what kindneſs the Lord ſtill continues to ſhew his people. We have his word and ordinances; and we may

well believe they have their effects, however little obſerved: for *wherever he makes name be recorded, he will come* unto his people, *and bleſs them.* While he favours us with the pure preaching of the word and the adminiſtration of his ordinances, ſome will *be born in Zion;* ſome will be edified; Chriſtians may want a very comfortable ſenſe of the Lord's preſence, but ſtill his hand will lead them and ſupport them. Perhaps indeed they know it not now; but they ſhall know hereafter. O how much reaſon have believers to be thankful for what light and conviction, for what ſtrength, refreſhment and eſtabliſhment the Lord affords them by means of his word, even while they are ſaying, *Verily, thou art a God that hideſt thyſelf, O God of Iſrael, the Saviour!*

It is true, The church of Chriſt is no more appropriated to any particular kingdom or corner of the world: She is not repreſented in ſcripture as ſtationary, but as ſojourning from place to place: So that the Lord may ſoon remove his candleſtick out of its place, and no one has ground to aſſure himſelf of its continuance for any particular ſpace of time. We may only obſerve, that theſe lands of Britain and Ireland have been particularly honoured, not only in the eminent degree to which reformation has been carried in them; but in regard of the expreſs and formal manner in which the Lord condeſcended to take them into covenant-relation with himſelf. It is true, the Jews were highly honoured in this reſpect, and yet they have been cut off. Nay, the Lord's anger ſeems to burn with peculiar intenſeneſs againſt thoſe who having entered into covenant with him, are obſtinate in departing from him: if they will not be *his people*, according to their ſolemn engagement, he will make them *no people.* The political conſtitution of the Jews was deſtroyed almoſt at the ſame time with their eccleſiaſtical: when they ceaſed to be the church of God, they ceaſed to be a nation. We are aſſured, however, that the deſperſed remains of

them ſhall yet be *turned to the Lord.* They are ſtill preſerved diſtinct from all the nations among whom they are ſcattered for this, among other important ends, that their converſion may be the more conſpicuous. In like manner, though theſe lands ſhould depart ſtill farther from the Lord, and though he ſhould be provoked to make them a deſolation; yet after all ſuch dreadful calamities, when we ſhall be brought to know the Lord, we may look for a revival of his work: *He will bring a third part thro' the fire, and will refine them as ſilver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they ſhall call on his name, and he will hear them: he will ſay, it is my people; and they ſhall ſay, the Lord is my God.* When the Lord's time comes, all the oppoſition to his work from prejudices, from the moſt deep-rooted opinions, from civil laws and conſtitutions, will prove no more than flax before the devouring flame. It is, indeed, affecting to think of the calamities that are likely to take place before ſo glorious a revolution: but it will comfort the heart of a real Chriſtian to conſider that even the calamities of Britain and Ireland, will be over-ruled to the advancement of Chriſt's kingdom; that they bear the moſt threatening aſpect on the enemies of his work in theſe lands; and may be ſomehow an occaſion of the ſpreading of the goſpel to the remoteſt climes and to the moſt barbarous nations.

F I N I S.

INDEX.

A

ABEL's profeſſion, Page 100.
Abraham, the church's profeſſion from him to Moſes, 105——112. Of the Lord's covenant with him, 106—108. Of his profeſſion, 108, 109.
Accommodation of our covenants to our preſent circumſtances, 263.
Adam, Of the church's profeſſion from him to Abraham, 99——105.
Admonition, 324.
Antioch, a diſpute among the church-members of, determined at Jeruſalem, 189, 190.
Ariminum in Italy a council at, 191.
Arius's hereſy, 190.
Aſa, the covenanting in his time, 143—145.
Aſſociate Presbytery, formed, 33. their entering into the bond for renewing our covenants, 256. their act concerning covenanting, 263, 264.
Athanaſius, 192.
Augsburg, a diet of the empire held there, 197, 198.

B

Babyloniſh captivity, advantageous to the church, 155.
Baptiſmal engagements how to be underſtood, 60, 61.
Bohemia, the brethren and ſiſters of, 194.
Breach of covenant an aggravated ſin, 79, 80.
Burgeſs Oaths, on the controverſy concerning the religious clauſe of, 5——26.

C

Calvin's agreement with the church of Zurich, 199, 200.
Campbel Mr. his tenets, 32.
Cenſures, the church's power to inflict them, 313——321. nature of them, 321—324.

Ceremonial laws, 118.
Ceremonies, not commanded of God, no way like covenanting, 63, 64.
Cerinthus, 187.
Character of Covenanters, 62, 63.
Charles Vth. his oppoſition to the reformed religion, 196, 197.
Charles I. ſtruggles between him and the Scots, 214——221.
Chriſtianity different from all other religions, 366, 367. how we ſhould enquire into the evidences of it, 373, 374.
Church, how the word is uſed in ſcripture, 279, 281, 316, 317.
Church-communion, the nature of, 281—286. when that of a particular church may be departed from, 22, 23, 24.
Concordate, 199.
Confeſſions of the Proteſtant churches, 200.
Confeſſions of faith, how ratified at the revolution, 268, 271.
Congregation, when the Scots reformers were ſo called, 203.
Conſtantinople a council held at, 192.
Conſtitution of the Aſſociate Synod, 312, 313.
Covenant how the word is uſed in ſcripture, 168, 169.
Covenanting, characteriſtics of it, 46——62, how diſtinguiſhed from the ſacraments, 57—63, *Hiſtory* of it, 96, 97, 98—265
Creeds of the ancient churches. 180,-192.

D

Deiſm, the cauſes of it, 359—361.
Delivering up to Satan, the meaning of in the New Teſtament, 336, 337.
Deſpondency of Chriſtians, 410.
Devotional ſelfiſhneſs, 384, 385.
Dort, the Synod of, 201.

E

Ebion's hereſy, 187.
Education the prejudices of it, 372, 373.
Ends of covenanting, 81, 82.
Enos, the ſtate of the church at his death, 100, 101.
Enthuſiaſm, 100, 181.
Egypt, 56, 91.
Eraſmus, a ſaying of, 195.
Eutyches's hereſy, 193.
Eſſentials and circumſtantials, 287.
Examples, the uſe of thoſe in ſcripture, 180, 181, of thoſe in church hiſtory, 187.
Excommunication, 327. under the Old Teſtament, 327——332. under the new, 333——339. grounds of it, 339——342. conſiſtent with charity, 342—345. hiſtory of it, 347——358.
Ezra, the covenanting in his time, 257, 258.

F

Fathers severe in the exercise of church discipline, 353.
France, a bond entered into by the Protestant church of, 201, 202.

G

Gibeonites, their league with Joshua, 69. 70. obligation of it analogous to that of covenanting, 70, 71, 72.

H

Ham excommunicated by Noah, 349.
Herem, 350.
Hezekiah's covenanting, 147—150.
High commission, the court of, 213.
Hussites, 174.

I

James I. 212—214.
Idolatry, 128, 129.
Jehoash the covenanting in his time, 145, 146.
Jewish state, 120——130. and church 130—132.
Independents, overturned the reformation in England, 232, their toleration, 247, 248.
Indulgences popish, 302.
Joshua's renewal of the covenant, 140, 141.
Josiah, the covenanting in his time, 151——154.
Ireland covenanting in, 234
Isaac and Jacob the covenant renewed with, 111. profession of the latter. 111, 112.
Judicial laws, 1119.

K

Kings of Israel useful to the church, 142, 143. in what characters many of them acted, 148, 149.

L

Law, why the Lord's revelation to Moses so called, 114. how it is to be considered as it was given by Moses, 115—117. of the nature and different kinds of the laws of Moses, 118—120.
Leith besieged, 206, the last bond at, 207.
Liberty contended for in the reformation of Scotland, 202, and in the covenanting of the three kingdoms, 215.
Lollards, 194.
Lorain, the house of, 202.

M

Marrow of Modern Divinity condemned by the Gen. Assembly, 32.
Martyrs for our covenanted reformation, 244.
Mary Queen of Scots, 208, 209.
Monuments of idolatry destroyed, 203, 204.
Moral nature of covenanting, 174——177.
Moses, Of the Lord's revelation to, 113.
Murray earl of, 209.

N

Nations may join in covenanting, 65, 66, 173.
Nehemiah, covenanting in his time, 159——161.
New Testament dispensation, the characteristics of, 167——174.
Noah's covenant, 101—103. his profession, 104, 105.

O

Oath, the important nature of it, 13. religious oaths imposed by civil societies, 5.
Obligations from covenanting 67. the extent of them, 68——80. those of our covenants recognised in the bond of the Associate Presbytery, 253.
Occasional duties, 84, 85. occasion of public covenanting, 83——96. at present, 264.
Offences given to Christians, 14.
Old Testament, its uses and obligations, 161——167.

P

Perth a treaty at, 204, 205.
Practice of a duty having been long neglected no reason for omitting it, 158, 159.
Presbyterial exercise of church power, 316——321.
Profession of religion, 18, 19.
Progress in reformation how to be endeavoured, 41, 42.
Promise, why the revelation made to Abraham so called, 107, 108, 114.
Protestants, the rise of that appellation, 197.
Public resolutioners, 39, 229, 230.

Q

Queen Regent under the influence of the house of Loraine, 202. Her opposition to the reformers, 203——207.

R

Rebuke, 234.
Rechabites, 74, 75.
Reformation, the difficulties of, 195.

Renewing of the covenant which the Iſraelites had entered into at Sinai, 139, 140.
Renovation of our covenants in the Seceſſion, 237.
Repreſentation neceſſary in ſome religious duties, 68. and in covenanting, 74, 75.
Revolution, the advantages of it, 266, how miſimproved, 267——278.

S

Sacraments, why baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper called ſo, 59, 60.
Samoſatenus's hereſy, 189.
Seceſſion teſtimony, 27, 45. its riſe and progreſs, 30—33. matter of it not new, 34, 35. explained in three particulars, 35——40.
Shammatha, 325, 326.
Signs were in place of hiſtory in the Patriarchal age, 110.
Simſon Mr. his tenets, 32.
Sinai, the tranſaction at, 115, 116, 117, 133, 134.
Smalcaldic league, 198, 199.
Solemn league and covenant, 230——236. defended, 237——254.

T

Temporizer the character of, 375, 376, 377.
Teſtimony of the church, the nature of, 28, 29.
Tumult occaſioned by the impoſition of the Engliſh Liturgy, 216.

U

United provinces, 200.

V

Valens and Urſacius two artful oppoſers of the Nicene Creed, 191, 192.
Variety in religion, 372.
Vowing, a characteriſtic of covenanting, 52, 53.

W

Waldenſes and Wickliffites, 188, 189.
Worms, a diet of the empire held at, 196.

Z

Zeno, the emperor's henoticon, 192, 193.

THE END.

ERRATA.

Page 36. line. dele *go forth and.* P. 49. l. 5. for *languages* read *language.* Page 55. l. 4. dele *the purport of.* P. 268. l. 15. for *act that* read *act of that.* P. 363. l. 23. for *natural* read *material.* P. 368. l. 34 and 35. for *Fohi* read *Fo.*